



THE NEW MERMAIDS



Volpone

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## ILLUSTRATIONS

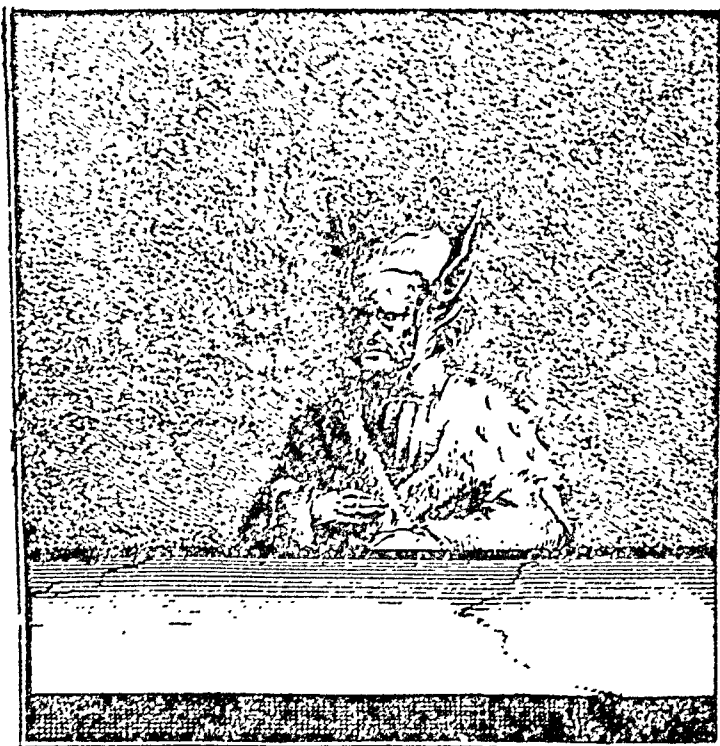


Figure 1 'Hood an ass with reverend purple,  
So you can hide his two ambitious ears,  
And, he shall pass for a cathedral doctor.'

The illustration is from Holbein's engravings to Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, see page 23.

Figure 2 Stage structure simplified from an arcade of honour,  
Brussels, 1594. The figures in the original illustration have  
been omitted.

Figure 3 A Mountebank Stage, c. 1600.

Figures 2 and 3 appear in C. Walter Hodges, *The Globe Restored*  
(London, 1953).

# INTRODUCTION

## THE AUTHOR

BEN JONSON was born a Londoner in 1572, the posthumous son of an impoverished gentleman. His mother married a bricklayer shortly afterwards, and his circumstances in youth were decidedly straitened. Through the intervention of an outsider, however, he had some education at Westminster School under William Camden, who remained a lifelong friend; but he probably did not finish school and certainly did not go on, as most of his contemporaries there did, to Oxford or Cambridge. Instead he was apprenticed, probably in his stepfather's craft, about 1589, remaining in it long enough only to learn he 'could not endure' it. Before 1597 he had volunteered to serve in Flanders where, during a lull in the fighting, 'in the face of both the camps', he met and killed one of the enemy in single combat and returned from no-man's-land with his victim's weapons. The scene is an emblem for his life: the giant figure, a party to neither faction, warring alone in the classical manner before his awed onlookers.

Sometime in the early 1590s he married. By the time he was twenty-five he was playing the lead in Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* for the theatrical manager and entrepreneur Philip Henslowe. As a writer he may also have composed additions to Kyd's work; he certainly did so for Nashe's satirical *Isle of Dogs*, and was imprisoned for the 'slandrous matter' in it. But already by 1598 Francis Meres listed him in *Palladis Tamia* amongst 'our best for tragedy' along with Kyd himself and Shakespeare. These tragedies, and indeed all the work of his early twenties, have vanished, but in the surviving records the man bursts upon the theatrical scene with characteristic and transforming energy.

In 1598 as well his first great success in comedy, *Every Man in his Humour*, was produced; in this, as in *Sejanus*, Shakespeare played a leading role. Within the same month Jonson killed an actor in Henslowe's company, Gabriel Spencer, in a duel. He pleaded guilty to a charge of felony and saved himself from the gallows only by claiming 'benefit of clergy', that is, by proving his literacy and hence immunity by reading 'neck-verse'. His goods—such as they may have been—were confiscated and he was branded on the thumb. His career was not yet fully under way: in writing of the incident, Henslowe refers to Jonson as a 'bricklayer'.

Still in the same year *The Case is Altered* was acted, once again

with great success, and in 1599 or 1600 came *Every Man Out of his Humour*, which—although it too enhanced his growing reputation—included in the targets of its satire the diction of some contemporary playwrights, notably John Marston. Marston may have annoyed his older friend by a bungled attempt to flatter him in *Histriomastix* a few months earlier, but he was in any case ready to take very unfriendly revenge for *Every Man Out* when, in late 1600, he caricatured Jonson in *Jack Drum's Entertainment*. Jonson countered with *Cynthia's Revels*, Marston with *What You Will*, Jonson with *Poetaster*, all in 1601. Thomas Dekker, previously Jonson's collaborator on the lost tragedy *Page of Plymouth*, came to Marston's aid with *Satiromastix*. But Jonson had gone beyond attacking his attackers: his plays, and particularly *Poetaster*, satirised influential men, and he barely escaped prosecution again. He withdrew, not yet thirty years old, from comedy and the popular stage, into the patronage and protection first of Sir Robert Townshend and later of Esmé Stewart, Lord Aubigny, to whom he dedicated the fruit of his retirement, *Sejanus*.

Once again Jonson's talent for trouble caused him difficulty with the authorities, this time on the pretext of 'popery and treason'—he had become a Catholic during his imprisonment for killing Spencer—and once again powerful friends intervened to save him. Still again in 1604, when he collaborated with his reconciled friend Marston and with George Chapman on the comedy *Eastward Ho!* he was jailed, now for satirising the Scots, for James I was king. But once more he was let off, and on the whole the accession of James I was of great benefit to Jonson: for this brilliant and learned court he wrote almost all his many masques, delicate confections of erudition and artistry in which he knew no master.

But it is to *Volpone* (1605), *Epicoene* (1609–10), (1610), *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) and *The Devil is an Ass* we must turn for the central documents of his interrupted only by the tragic (and successful) *Catharine*. Jonson had by 1612 become court poet, a position of great scope and influence, for in that year he wrote the masque which would enshrine in an English play the theme of his life. His close connections with the court gave up Catholicism about 1604, and he began to begot by his huge reading in the commonplace-book *Timber*, led to the acquaintance of the playwrights of his age, to take such part as he could in their work.

Jonson continued writing his masques, but no stage play appeared after *Sejanus* of *News* in 1625. Jonson's fortune

Ass  
nine

He began them with a walking tour to Scotland in 1618, where Drummond recorded their *Conversations*, and with a visit to Oxford in 1619, where the University made him a Master of Arts. He ended them increasingly destitute of health, money and invention. His rule over the 'tribe' that met at the Mermaid was unweakened, but he depended more and more on pensions from Crown and City, especially when he failed to maintain with Charles I the favour he found with the scholarly James I.

There followed *The New Inn* (1629), *The Magnetic Lady* (1632), and *The Tale of a Tub* (1633); the first was a disaster the last two did little to mitigate. Apart from a few verses he wrote nothing thereafter (his *English Grammar*, a draft of which perished in the fire that destroyed his library in 1623, probably goes back to a period as Professor of Rhetoric at Gresham College), although his life-long habit of reading was not broken. He did not complete work on the second folio which was to include his writings since 1612. No child of his survived him, and it fell to his intellectual disciples, the 'Sons of Ben', to be his literary executors.

He died on 6 August 1637, at the age of sixty-five, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

W. F. B.

## THE PLAY

*Volpone*, or *The Fox*, was the work of a single commanding act of the imagination, written in five weeks, making one sustained experience from a great diversity of materials and insights. It carries an air of spontaneity and gay improvisation, and yet it continually wins effects that stand up to exacting reflective analysis. It is an act (to borrow Jonson's rhetoric) 'worthy of celebration', and not a 'declamatory and windy invective'.

The dedicatory Epistle is to the 'Most Equal' (that is, equally just and judicious) Universities of Oxford and Cambridge; the scene is set in Venice; and the first performances were by Shakespeare's company (the King's Men) at the London Globe. These circumstances begin to mark the lineaments of the play; it is a comedy of city-life by a scholar-playwright, and it displays the enterprise and extravagance of Renaissance Venice for the entertainment of a popular English audience. This way of putting it awakens certain expectations and quietens others; the play is about a way of life within a whole society, its implicit judgements and modes of analysis will satisfy the academic mind, and its verve and vitality will engage and delight the public at large.

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But it is to *Volpone* (1605), *Epicoene* (1609–10), *The Alchemist* (1610), *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) and *The Devil is an Ass* (1616) that we must turn for the central documents of his comic maturity, interrupted only by the tragic (and unsuccessful) *Catiline* of 1611. Jonson had by 1612 become conscious of the scope of his accomplishment, for in that year he began work on a collective edition which would enshrine in an impressive folio the authoritative text. His close connections with the court, doubtless enhanced when he gave up Catholicism about 1610, and the literary self-awareness begot by his huge reading in the classics, in part recorded in his commonplace-book *Timber*, led him, unique amongst the playwrights of his age, to take such pains with his *oeuvre*.

Jonson continued writing his masques and non-dramatic poems, but no stage play appeared after *The Devil is an Ass* until *The Staple of News* in 1625. Jonson's fortune declined in the nine years between.

He began them with a walking tour to Scotland in 1618, where Drummond recorded their *Conversations*, and with a visit to Oxford in 1619, where the University made him a Master of Arts. He ended them increasingly destitute of health, money and invention. His rule over the 'tribe' that met at the Mermaid was unweakened, but he depended more and more on pensions from Crown and City, especially when he failed to maintain with Charles I the favour he found with the scholarly James I.

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In the daunting phrases of the Epistle, Jonson may be accounted a

'learned and liberal soul' whose office as comic poet requires him to 'imitate justice', 'instruct to life' and to 'purity of language', and to 'stir up gentle affections'. He will perform for London the services that Horace once performed for Rome; but his responsibilities are equally towards his art—he will 'raise the despised head of poetry again' and 'render her worthy to be embraced, and kissed, of all the great and master spirits of our world'. We may, therefore, survey the play from the platform that Jonson himself has afforded.

#### THE IMITATION OF JUSTICE

Jonson speaks in his Epistle of the 'strict rigour of comic law' and says that his own catastrophe (*dénouement*) may be thought not to accord with it; but the happy ending that would satisfy one kind of pedantry about the nature of comedy, would leave unsatisfied those who clamour for the punishment of vice. Jonson is content to remind his university public that even ancient comedies do not always end happily, but the passage may recall us to the distinct but elusive analogy between comic justice and moral justice—they are not the same but they are often alike. In the final scene Volpone is exposed to the 'strict rigour' not of the comic but of the criminal law; but Jonson insinuates that the judicious will recognise that this is exactly what the comedy itself demands. The comedy requires that comic justice should be executed by the knaves before it is executed upon them.

Jonson is well aware of the contiguity between his own role as plotter of the play's large design, and the roles of the knaves who plot its particular mischiefs. So it happens that the excitements of the play and the nature of its insights owe much to the wit and understanding displayed by Mosca and Volpone as it were on Jonson's behalf. The resourcefulness of the comic playwright, the confidence trickster and the criminal alike, is dramatic and histrionic—they are good at contriving ways out of difficult situations, at putting on an act, and at taking people in. Many of the gloating exchanges between Mosca and Volpone therefore read like Jonson's compliments to his own art—'Good wits are greatest in extremities', 'to make/So rare a music out of discords', 'Scoto himself could hardly have distinguished!'. But the playwright's art is decisively more comprehensive than the knave's, in ways both obvious and subtle.

The gull-and-knave pattern of comic episode has a long history from Aristophanes and Plautus, the Roman *fabulae togatae* (in which the country visitor was often taken in by the city sophisticate) and the *commedia dell'arte*, through Tudor interludes and entertainments and university drama, into the popular comedy of the fifteenth-century. But it is Jonson (with some prompting from Marlowe's

*Jew of Malta*) who most fully-realises its potentials. The knave of the new plays is not only like the parasite of the old classical plays—exploiting human weakness in order to prosper; he is also like the devil in the medieval moralities—exposing man's weaknesses and feeding their vices to damn them.<sup>1</sup>

### Mosca's Justice

Mosca, self-confessedly a parasite and by Volpone called a devil, works to the ends appropriate to both. As a parasite he enjoys the limber wit of the game, its transcendental skill ('dropped from above'); but as a devil he exhibits a perverse mastery of the moral law. When he approaches Bonario under cover of friendship (III.ii) he is like Hypocrisy or Dissimulation in an old play,<sup>2</sup> pretending to be good fellowship in order to serve the devil's ends. His mastery of the appearance and language of virtue moves him to tears and overcomes all the resistance of his allegorically named victim. There is a kind of validity, however, in his claim to 'an interest in the general state/Of goodness, and true virtue' (whether or not Mosca is punning on his different kind of interest in Bonario's estate). All four legacy hunters who attend upon Volpone through Mosca's agency are fittingly abused and tormented for vices that are almost systematically delineated; the seven deadly sins are partners to the gulls' dance but they do not come undisguised—pride, for example, is assimilated into Voltore's forensic vanity, anger finds occasion in Corvino's jealousy and lechery in his lingering upon Aretine (III. vii, 58–64). Envy, gluttony and sloth are subsumed into the pervasive parasitic avarice, the pre-eminent vice of the acquisitive society. Mosca professes this degree of wisdom and upon each gull in turn he passes his derisive sentence:

Go home, and use the poor Sir Pol, your knight, well;  
For fear I tell some riddles: go, be melancholic. (V.iii, 44–5)

Lady Would-be does indeed (in Jonson's play as well as Mosca's) come 'most melancholic, home'; the same verdict lights upon Corvino, but touched with perverse magnanimity:

Why, think that these good works  
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<sup>1</sup> For some developments of the devil and the diabolical villain in medieval and Tudor drama, see Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil*, 1958.

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The judgement upon Corbaccio awakens exactly the sensations of physical disgust that Jonson has put to his making:

Are not you he, that filthy covetous wretch,  
With the three legs, that here, in hope of prey,  
Have, any time this three year, snuffed about,  
With your most grov'ling nose; and would have hired  
Me to the poisoning of my patron? sir?

. . . . Go home, and die, and stink. (V.iii, 67-71, 74)

The displacement of obsequiousness by a purging arrogance (indicated by 'sir?' above) that can be roared out to the deaf ear of Corbaccio in one terrible injunction, is succeeded by the equally effacing, casual and caressing insolence bestowed upon Voltore:

You, that have so much law, I know ha' the conscience,  
Not to be covetous of what is mine. (V.iii, 97-8)

The gull-and-knave structure as Jonson contrives it allows the knave, therefore, to prevail over the gull not alone because of his superior know-how, but also because of his superior moral insight. He is the scourge of inadequacies and follies, and even of crimes, that the society would have tolerated or overlooked, through inertia or defective government. About *Volpone*, the point can be made the more readily because society itself is directly gulled—both as a public in the Piazza, acclaiming the fake mountebank (himself a charlatan), and as a formal body in the Scrutineo, where the Avocatori are tricked by a knavish display of mock obsequiousness and indulgent moral indignation. The law (to recollect Dogberry and anticipate Dickens) is writ down an ass.

### Jonson's Justice

From Bonario's point of view and Celia's, the happy outcome of the action is attributable to divine intervention—'Heaven could not, long, let such gross crimes be hid'. But Jonson knows that divine intervention in a play is the playwright's responsibility ('let no god intervene', says Horace, 'unless a knot come worthy of such a deliverer') and that he must observe, in some sense, the rigour of comic law. It appears that justice is finally imitated (that is, made manifest in the theatre) not by the vigilance of the criminal law, but by the process through which the knaves finally betray each other. It can be known by its commonplace tags and proverbs ('set a thief to catch a thief', 'pride before a fall', 'thieves fall out') but Jonson explores its intellectual and imaginative dynamics, without confining attention to the punishment of vice. *Volpone* and *Mosca* are not

arbitrarily struck down by their creator's whim or by his servile regard for conventional morality. Jonson's art makes it imperative that they consume themselves with the very energies and fantasies that animate them. To appreciate Jonson's justice we must look more widely at his moral judgements, his poetry and his theatre.

### 'INSTRUCTION TO LIFE'

Jonson's phrase may be generously interpreted to suggest all the discoveries that the comic-poet makes about the impulses and principles by which men live, both in themselves and in the society about them. Recognising that the play is about virtuosity and is itself a feat of virtuosity, what has virtuosity to do with virtue, and what openings for either did the city cultures of Venice and London provide?

The question in respect to virtuosity has been partly answered—the characteristic vices of the city money-grabbers invited the exercise of the skills of the confidence-trickster. In respect to virtue, it is best considered through the language and postures of the dominant figure, Volpone, fox and magnifico.

### Volpone the Magnifico

Usually the conventions of the theatre do not allow us to attribute poetic gifts to the characters of a play (the sentiments are theirs, the arts that convey them are the poet's) but from the profane matins of the opening scene to the closing pun of the last, Volpone is a self-consciously accomplished performer. Jonson's wit plays sardonically upon itself as he touches the parallels between his own talents and his hero's—both inventive, clever mimics, plotters, public entertainers, poets, singers and critics. The mountebank scene seems to be charged with specific allusions to Jonson's own situation,<sup>3</sup> but delight in the rarity of an imposture never wholly disarms judgement.

A good poet, says the Epistle, must be a good man, for it is among the offices of a poet to 'inflame grown men to all great virtues'. But 'virtue' is not an indivisible word describing a definitive group of qualities, and in Jonson's time it was the more complicated because it retained something of its radical Latin sense 'that which becomes a man', together with its current sense 'moral excellence'. There is no necessary tension between manliness and goodness, but their relationship is not a stable one, and the art of the Renaissance often explores and dramatises it; Lady Macbeth's taunt, for instance, and Macbeth's response:

Art thou afeard

To be the same in thine own act and valour

As thou art in desire?

\* See II.ii, 27 note.



I dare do all that may become a man;  
Who dares do more is none.

When you durst do it, then you were a man.

(*Macbeth* I.vii, 39-41, 46-7, 49)

In a different province of moral experience, Volpone's encounter with Celia in the seduction scene is of the same kind. Celia's despair finds expression in a graphic indictment of Venetian morality:

Is that, which ever was a cause of life,  
Now placed beneath the basest circumstance?  
And modesty an exile made, for money? (III.vii, 136-8)

Volpone, springing from his bed, offers to despise and to transcend the bond that weds her to the impotence of Corvino; he proclaims a higher cause of life than her betrayed and forfeit fidelity:

Ay, in Corvino, and such earth-fed minds,  
That never tasted the true heaven of love.  
Assure thee, Celia, he that would sell thee,  
Only for hope of gain, and that uncertain,  
He would have sold his part of paradise  
For ready money, had he met a cope-man. (III.vii, 139-44)

Because the contempt for the acquisitive merchant is authentic and just, we are the more ready to entertain the elated assurances of the 'true heaven of love', and to allow the buoyant cadences of the verse to carry speech into song, unresisting. But so to say is manifestly to yield to the seducer. The seducer's persuasive arts have their history in Marlowe, in Catullus, and in the garden of Eden.

Marlowe's early plays tuned English verse to sound those astonishing hubristic hyperboles that make it man's virtue to be a god:

Christian Merchants that with Russian sterne  
Plough up huge furrows in the Caspian sea,  
Shall vail to us, as Lords of all the Lake.

Jove sometime masked in a Shepherd's weed,  
And by those steps that he hath scal'd the heavens,  
May we become immortal like the Gods.

(*Tamburlaine* I, 387-9, 394-6)

Volpone has a different disdain for merchants:

I use no trade, no venture  
..... expose no ships  
To threat'nings of the furrow-faced sea. (I.i, 33, 37-8)

and a different aspiration to Olympus:

Whilst we, in changèd shapes, act Ovid's tales,  
 Thou, like Europa now, and I like Jove,  
 Then I like Mars, and thou like Erycine,  
 So, of the rest, till we have quite run through  
 And wearied all the fables of the gods. (III.vii, 221-5)

But in the movement and range of the imagination there is a significant continuity. Volpone can be represented as indulging the fantasies of a Marlovian hero (for much might be said too of Faustus and Barabas) in a society of corrupt money makers, where the merchants 'expose' their ships to danger but themselves stay home to secure and invest their property—including their wives. Marlowe's Elizabethan eagerness for sovereignty over the plenitude of the earth is still finding expression in Volpone's words to Celia:

See, behold,  
 What thou art queen of; not in expectation,  
 As I feed others; but possessed, and crowned. (III.vii, 188-90)

And Volpone has a contempt comparable with Marlowe's for 'earth-bred minds' and for the 'beggar's virtue' (conscience) that he opposes to his own 'wisdom', but where Marlowe's loves of conquest, sensual satisfaction, and knowledge are heroic:

And every warrior that is rapt with love,  
 Of fame, of valour, and of victory  
 Must needs have beauty beat on his conceits.  
 (Tamburlaine I, 1961-3)

Volpone's conquests are amorous, his senses look for less aetherial satisfaction, and his knowledge serves for the 'cunning purchase' of his wealth.

While Volpone's vainglory looks back to Marlowe, his lyrical importunity is from Catullus, as Jonson re-creates the celebrated fifth poem (*Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus*) to convey yet more poignantly the transience of the lovers' opportunities. The prospect of an illicit affair in difficult domestic circumstances is transfigured by the song's rhythm and by its easy disdain of ordinary human values:

Why should we defer our joys?  
 Fame, and rumour are but toys.  
 Cannot we delude the eyes  
 Of a few poor household spies? (III.vii, 174-7)

Celia's resistance to Volpone's enticements feels in context like a resistance to the poet's art as well as the seducer's:

Good sir, these things might move a mind affected  
 With such delights; but I, whose innocence  
 Is all I can think wealthy, or worth th'enjoying,

And which once lost, I have nought to lose beyond it,  
 Cannot be taken with these sensual baits. (III.vii, 206-10)

And Jonson is certainly well aware of the strength of the tradition that Volpone represents, with its sense of virtue closely consonant with virility, and sanctioned in pagan mythology by one of Volpone's patron deities, Jove. But the play encompasses both Volpone's virtue and Celia's, and before the scene ends we are made to see the Circean charm give place to gross violence, with 'lust' (the vice in Celia's view most remote from 'manliness') brutally opposed to frigidity and impotence, Volpone's versions of the rival values.

The more conventional kind of goodness embodied in Celia and Bonario is allowed its modicum of strength and resolution, but it is scarcely efficient in the play. It is enough that the master-knaves destroy themselves through over-weening wit and fantasy; like Marlowe's heroes they are over-reachers, whether in self-exhausting, self-consuming phantasmagoria:

Our drink shall be preparèd gold, and amber;  
 Which we will take, until my roof whirl round  
 With the vertigo. . . .

And I will meet thee, in as many shapes:  
 Where we may, so, transfuse our wand'ring souls,  
 Out at our lips, and score up sums of pleasures.

(III.vii, 217-9, 233-5)

or in self-entangling, self-betraying conspiracy:

To make a snare, for mine own neck! and run  
 My head into it, wilfully! with laughter!

(V.xi, 1-2)

Volpone's spell, however, continues to testify to a kind of virtue long after it has been seen for what it is. The bounty that he offers Celia is like that which Mammon in *The Alchemist* would bestow upon the whole of mankind, and it is a travesty of Aristotle's 'magnificence'—the virtue that can only be displayed by a man with great resources (material and spiritual).<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche's Zarathustra supplies the vindicating aphorisms:<sup>5</sup>

Your soul striveth insatiably for treasures and jewels because  
 your virtue is ever insatiable in the will to give.

Ye compel all things to come unto you and into you, that  
 they may flow back from your fount as gifts of your love.

<sup>4</sup> See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* IV.ii.

<sup>5</sup> Thus *Spake Zarathustra*, translated by Tille and Bozman, Everyman's Library 1933, pp. 66-7. A comprehensive history of ideas of *Virtù*, *Virtus* and *Virtue* could reasonably begin with Zoroaster; but the relevant figures for Jonson are Marlowe and (perhaps) Machiavelli.

But he can also supply the necessary qualification:

But we hold in horror the degenerate mind that saith:  
'All for myself!'

Volpone does not, after all, honour and fulfil his role of Magnifico in the Venetian state. The tardy Venetian law does at last discover his weakness and Mosca's:

These possess wealth, as sick men possess fevers,  
Which, trulier, may be said to possess them. (V.xii, 101-2)

### Sir Politic in Venice

The play is so contrived that the episodes of the main plot and the sub-plot seem to belong to the circumambient civilisation. Venice was famed for its mercantile prosperity, its proud resources of gold and treasure, the splendour of its architecture and exuberance of its art, the intensity and ceremony of its public life. Its fame lends resonance to many of the play's local allusions—the Portico to the Procuratia, the Arsenale, and even the Piscaria—and its reputation makes it a probable setting for luxurious living and extravagant fancy; but, as Shakespeare recognises in *The Merchant of Venice*, it is a city of commercial know-how where money can be made by ruthless exploitation.

Thomas Coryat's *Crudities* ('Hastily gobbled up in five Moneths travells') is not a source for *Volpone* (it was published in 1611) but, as Herford and Simpson show, it witnesses appropriately to an Englishman's impressions of Venice at the time, and supplies circumstantial glosses on the Venetian scene—from its courtesans to its strappado (see appendix of Analogues and Documents). Coryat, while not always preferring accuracy to human interest, was a good reporter and sufficiently experienced in the ways of the world. It may be that Jonson nevertheless had his eye on Coryat's kind, even (it has been suggested) upon a specific example, another English traveller to Venice, Sir Antony Shirley.<sup>6</sup> However this may be, the presence in the play of Sir Politic and Lady Would-be, and of Peregrine (whose name means both 'hawk' and 'traveller') reminds us of a range of self-deluding fantasies that a foolish Englishman abroad may entertain about foreigners. The Sir Pol episodes are intricately related to the wit of the play without for an instant losing their

<sup>6</sup> The first version of Shirley's book was: *A True Report of Sir Antonie Shirlies Journey overland to Venice, from thence to Seaton, Antioch, Aleppo, and Babilon, and so to Casbine in Persia*. It was published in 1600 but suppressed as unlicensed. A version by William Parry was authorised and published in 1601.

disarming simplicity. Primarily they contribute to the pattern of incidents and judgements that make the play an exercise in sophistication. A version of the gull-knave relationship is used to expose the absurd vanity of an aspirant to the seasoned traveller's brand of knowingness. In Volpone's and Mosca's plot, however, all the gulls fancy themselves a jump ahead of the others and believe themselves knaves. Sir Pol is from his talk taken for a naive impostor, by circumstance supposed a clumsy knave, and finally by design made a gull. Peregrine is not a knave, but sophistication courts knavery when its first principle is that a man should not readily be taken in, and that he should be good at taking in others:

Well, wise Sir Pol: since you have practised, thus,  
Upon my freshmanship, I'll try your salt-head,  
What proof it is against a counter-plot. (IV.iii, 22-4)

In Volpone's plot, the gulls are in the last phase taunted in turn for their failures of 'wisdom': Corbaccio (beard of 'grave length') is 'over-reached', Corvino ('traded in the world') is caught like the crow by the fox in the fable, and the skilled Voltore is left without a 'quirk to avoid gullage'. But the culpable innocence of Sir Pol is less offensive than the culpable guilt of the principal gulls; his punishment is correspondingly muted as he and his wife leave the Venetian clime and put to sea for 'physic'.<sup>7</sup>

The aptness of Peregrine's plot (and Jonson's) was to be nicely demonstrated some hundred and fifty years later when Lord Chesterfield played a similar trick on Montesquieu in Venice.<sup>8</sup> Following an argument about the precedence of French *esprit* and English common sense, Montesquieu returned from a sight-seeing round of Venice to find a badly dressed Frenchman waiting to warn him against meddling in Venetian affairs of state:

'... Les Inquisiteurs d'État ont les yeux ouverts sur votre conduite, on vous épie, on suit tous vos pas, on tient note de tous vos projets, on ne doute point que vous n'écriviez. Je sais de science certaine qu'on doit, peut-être aujourd'hui, peut-être demain, faire chez vous une visite. Voyez, monsieur, si en effet vous avez écrit, et songez, qu'une ligne innocente, mais mal interprétée, vous coûteroit la vie.'

When Chesterfield called a little while later he found that Montesquieu had burnt his papers and made arrangements to leave Venice at three o'clock in the morning.

The Chesterfield story shows that Jonson's wit might alight upon any traveller who displays innocent curiosity about a city and goes

<sup>7</sup> For the nature of Lady Would-be's pretensions see note on page 76.

<sup>8</sup> The story is fully reported by Diderot in a letter to Sophie Volland, 5 September 1762. See Herford and Simpson Vol. IX, p. 728.

about taking notes, but also that the aspirant to political wisdom is particularly vulnerable. It suggests too a generality of application that discounts attempts to turn Sir Pol into a specific caricature. The most canvassed figure has been Sir Henry Wotton, British ambassador to Venice for most of the period 1604 to 1624, but the circumstance would mainly ensure that Wotton (who was a friend of Jonson's) would have been among the play's most amused spectators—he had more reason than most to know the extent and boundaries of Venetian political intrigue. It is not improbable, however, that Jonson did enjoy the occasional satirical glance at an acquaintance or public figure including perhaps Sir Antony Shirley, and even Wotton.<sup>9</sup> But there is a great difference between opportunities casually taken and systematic caricature.

### Volpone, Mosca and the Classical Satirists

Although Venice supplies a good theatrical model for the acquisitive society devoted to the sanctities of gold, the play in so far as it is about legacy-hunters owes more to the satirists of Greece and Rome (particularly Lucian and Horace) and in so far as it is tragical satire it owes most to Juvenal. Legacy-hunting was a possible profession in ancient Greece, and is a favoured theme of the Greek New Comedy; in the Rome of Horace and Juvenal it is represented as a likely one; and in the later work of Lucian (writing in Athens) it is ubiquitous, and comes to the notice of the underworld where:<sup>10</sup>

Pluto directs Hermes to bring him the fortune and legacy-hunters and flatterers of a certain rich man, and to suffer the latter to outlive his fawning satellites.

The idea is capable of much refinement—some to be found in Lucian's continuation in the *Dialogues of the Dead*, and more in Jonson's play where Volpone becomes, as it were, his own Pluto and affords for himself a kind of survival. If Volpone owes something of his wit and sense of justice to Lucian, he may also be imagined a reader of Horace's fifth Satire of Book II, which offers the metaphor of the gaping crow (I.ii, 97) together with a few more insights into the nature of fawning satellites. It is not merely whimsical so to imagine, for Volpone and Mosca are self-consciously literary—

<sup>9</sup> The claim that Wotton is specifically caricatured is fully developed by J. D. Rea in his edition of the play (1919). For the other possibilities see Herford and Simpson Vol. IX, pp. 681–2; like Gifford, however, they would rule out Sir Thomas Sutton the founder of the Charterhouse, who was said by Aubrey to be a model for Volpone himself.

<sup>10</sup> The argument of *Dialogues of the Dead* V is quoted from H. Williams's translation (1913). The next four dialogues are also relevant.

disarming simplicity. Primarily they contribute to the pattern of incidents and judgements that make the play an exercise in sophistication. A version of the gull-knave relationship is used to expose the absurd vanity of an aspirant to the seasoned traveller's brand of knowingness. In Volpone's and Mosca's plot, however, all the gulls fancy themselves a jump ahead of the others and believe themselves knaves. Sir Pol is from his talk taken for a naive impostor, by circumstance supposed a clumsy knave, and finally by design made a gull. Peregrine is not a knave, but sophistication courts knavery when its first principle is that a man should not readily be taken in, and that he should be good at taking in others:

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The marvellous energy, invention and confidence of the masquerade, however they challenge and foil human distress, cannot wholly subdue it—even momentarily in the vigour of the rhetoric. It is therefore fitting that the diseased state that he mimics should finally overtake him, at first symbolically:

MOSCA

But what, sir, if they ask  
After the body?

VOLPONE

Say, it was corrupted.

MOSCA

I'll say it stunk, sir.

(V.ii, 76-8)

and finally, literally:

And, since the most was gotten by imposture,  
By feigning lame, gout, palsy, and such diseases,  
Thou art to lie in prison, cramped with irons,  
Till thou be'st sick, and lame indeed.

(V.xii, 121-4)

His wealth will be 'confiscate to the Hospital, of the *Incurabili*', founded, as the more knowledgeable Venetian traveller would remember, for the treatment of venereal disease. Juvenal would have enjoyed the joke.

Mosca's learning (if we may so put it) is more miscellaneous than Volpone's; his analysis of the vices and weaknesses of lawyers (I.iii, 51-66) and physicians (I.iv, 20-35) is from the Renaissance Latin of Cornelius Agrippa, while his entertainment in Act I, Scene ii, snatches material from Lucian, Diogenes Laertius, and Erasmus. But again, the wisdom is tactically and perversely deployed while Jonson's irony plays upon it: the physician is mocked by knave and mountebank, and the advocate is enlisted in criminal imposture, but disease and the law will finally take their course.

The entertainment has been taken by some commentators to be a significant encapsulation of the play's theme, and it does indeed offer a curious gloss on the main action. Its deliberate *gaucherie* of manner, however, and its placing in the play as an aspect of Volpone's amusement at the antics of freaks, prevent it from being the vehicle of momentous truths that J. D. Rea and others would make it. In Lucian's *Dialogue of the Cobbler and the Cock* the cock is able to use the tale of Pythagoras's migrant soul to reconcile the cobbler to his poverty; Mosca uses it to suggest that the wisdom of Pythagoras is now (embodied in the hermaphrodite) a plaything of the rich. But, as A. B. Kernan points out, the changing roles and forms in the play are not only a source of entertainment for Volpone and Mosca, they are manifestations of a grim process that finally overtakes them. In so



far as it idolises folly, the entertainment is rightly said to derive from Erasmus, but the debt is not profound; Jonson's debt in the play at large may be more so, but it cannot be adequately demonstrated from this scene alone.

### 'PURITY OF LANGUAGE'

Something has already been said, and much implied, about Jonson's poetic language. It might be seen as bringing Marlowe's energies under Horatian rule—a technical feat that corresponds to Jonson's readiness to subdue his sympathy with Renaissance aspirations to his respect for classical canons of good sense.

The phrase 'purity of language' may remind us that among the many pointless tensions expressed in the notorious war of the theatres, there is one that had a distinct significance and continues to animate the Epistle prefixed to *Volpone*: it is between those poets who are merely 'naturals' and 'contemners of all helps and arts', and those 'true artificers' whose 'divine instinct' is tempered by study and by labour. In its cruder forms the distinction looks like a simple one between the vulgar poet and the learned; but it is capable in Jonson's hands of much refinement, under the general maxim (from a Greek fragment) that 'without art, nature can never be perfect; and without nature art can claim no being.'<sup>11</sup>

The Epistle expresses disgust for those who write 'with such impropriety of phrase, such dearth of sense, so bold prolepses, so racked metaphors'. Jonson was probably thinking of Marston (much of the Epistle repeats material from the Apologetical Dialogue appended to the *Poetaster*) but he could also be anticipating Dr Johnson's Augustan judgement upon Shakespeare's style—'ungrammatical, perplexed and obscure'.

Jonson's dramatic poetry is often graphic where Shakespeare's is evocative, clear where Shakespeare is elusive, explicit where Shakespeare is mysterious. *Volpone*, for example, characterises the ruthlessness of society with clarity, gaiety and rigour:

I use no trade, no venture;  
I wound no earth with ploughshares; fat no beasts  
To feed the shambles; have no mills for iron,  
Oil, corn, or men, to grind 'em into poulder. (I.i, 33-6)

There are metaphors here—the wounded earth, the feeding of the slaughterhouse and the grinding of men to powder, but they are so immediately related to the phenomena they touch that they strike with almost literal force; it would not be surprising if Jonson meant the 'men' to be raw material for bone-meal or mummia. When

<sup>11</sup> See *Timber or Discoveries*, section cxxx.

Shakespeare's *Pericles* expresses his sense of human tyranny in Antioch, the boundaries of the metaphor are much less clear:

The blind mole casts

Copp'd hills towards heaven, to tell the earth is throng'd

By man's oppression; and the poor worm doth die for't.

(*Pericles* I.i, 99-101)

Jonson could not have invented a metaphor whose implications are so hard to contain; the mole seems to have been driven from the earth's surface and therefore blinded 'by man's oppression', its hills are a signal of protest towards heaven—and yet it too is an oppressor, a killer of worms. Shakespeare's metaphor obscurely suggests that oppression, protest and suffering are laws of the natural and human worlds. Jonson might well have found it 'racked'.

Other comparisons might be made with Shakespeare to similar purpose, between Isabella's resistance to Angelo in *Measure for Measure* and Celia's to Volpone, or between the Duke's contempt of life in that play (III.i, 5-40) and Volpone's (I.iv, 144-59), and almost every page of Shakespeare offers metaphors that Jonson would have thought indecorous. But decorum in Jonson's art is not merely a principle by which words are judged acceptable to polite taste; it is an energising force requiring that every word should meet in context the demands made upon it:

For a man to write well, there are required three necessities—to read the best authors, observe the best speakers, and much exercise of his own style. In style, to consider what ought to be written, and after what manner, he must first think and excogitate his matter, then choose his words, and examine the weight of either. Then take care, in placing and ranking both matter and words, that the composition be comely; and to do this with diligence and often. No matter how slow the style be at first, so it be laboured and accurate; seek the best, and be not glad of the forward conceits, or first words, that offer themselves to us; but judge of what we invent, and order what we approve. Repeat often what we have formerly written; which beside that it helps the consequence, and makes the juncture better, it quickens the heat of imagination, that often cools in the time of setting down, and gives it new strength, as if it grew lustier by going back.

(*Timber or Discoveries* cxv)

Jonson's labour and accuracy confers in the end an astonishing swiftness and power of movement. Voltore's speeches to the Scrutineo, for example, are totally composed of forensic skill and forensic pathos; the rhetoric is absolute, there are no expressions or cadences that do not wholly belong to it, for the 'invention' has been scrupulously judged:



decisively new. We have noticed that the conventions of Classical Comedy meet those of Tudor Interlude, and, it may be added, of the *commedia dell'arte*; brought to Jonson's forge and file (his favourite metaphors for the poet's craft) they are fashioned into a fabric at once massively and sensitively wrought. The debt to classical comedy has been sufficiently indicated—the gull-and-knave structure, the antics of the witty parasite, the satire upon professional men, the legacy-hunting motif, all have their beginnings in Greece and Rome. Medieval and Tudor plays, on the other hand, supply something of the moral design; the Devil and his acolytes (Dissimulation, Ambidexter, Hypocrisy) are still recognisable in Volpone and Mosca, while Volpone as seducer and tempter might be seen as in a different line from Satan in Eden or in the wilderness. Thus the spectacle of Mosca exposing at once the physical and the moral frailties of Corbaccio in Act I, Scene iv, might have satisfied a Roman audience or a medieval English one.

The Venetian scene made it appropriate if not prerequisite that the play should pay its respects to the *commedia dell'arte*. In part indeed it offers the *commedia* documentary recognition, as when Corvino calls Volpone's Scoto 'Flaminio', Celia 'Franciscina' and himself by the name of the stock cuckold 'Pantalone di Besogniosi', or when Volpone makes Nano his Zany and styles him Zan Fritada. More significantly, however, Italian comedy styles leave their mark on the manners and mood of the play as a whole. The play is not an improvisation but it often wins the best effects associated with improvisation; it is not a masked comedy (to name another Italian type) but it often works in the same way; it has no pantomime, but acted in silence its spectacle might still be made entertaining and significant.

The qualities of the play as emblematic spectacle owe much to its assimilation of beast fable, from Aesop or from popular lore:<sup>12</sup>

vulture, kite,

Raven, and gor-crow, all my birds of prey,  
That think me turning carcass, now they come.  
I am not for 'em yet.

. . . . not a fox

Stretched on the earth, with fine delusive sleights,  
Mocking a gaping crow? (I.ii, 89–92, 95–7)

Sir Pol is a chattering parrot, and so is his wife; Peregrine is a pilgrim

<sup>12</sup> See J. A. Barish, 'The Double Plot in *Volpone*', *Modern Philology* LI (1953), 83–92; reprinted in *Ben Jonson* (Twentieth Century Views) ed. Barish, 1963. See also D. A. Scheve, 'Traditional Fox Lore and *Volpone*', *Review of English Studies*, 1950, and H. Levin, 'Jonson's Metempsychosis', *Philological Quarterly*, 1943.

And, as for them, I will conclude with this,  
 That vicious persons when they are hot, and fleshed  
 In impious acts, their constancy abounds:  
 Damned deeds are done with greatest confidence.

(IV.vi, 50-3)

The staggering cheek of the closing thought perfects Voltore's malicious fantasy. It is one of the delights of Jonson's art that fantasies are splendidly articulated, whether Voltore's of righteous indignation, or Volpone's of sensual prodigality and golden dissolution:

See, here, a rope of pearl; and each, more orient  
 Than that the brave Egyptian queen caroused:  
 Dissolve, and drink 'em. See, a carbuncle,  
 May put out both the eyes of our St. Mark;  
 A diamant, would have bought Lollia Paulina,  
 When she came in, like star-light, hid with jewels,  
 That were the spoils of provinces . . .

(III.vii, 191-7)

The allusions to Cleopatra and to Lollia Paulina exemplify the contribution that creative imitation makes to the play, for Jonson borrows both notions of heroic indulgence from Pliny (*Natural History* ix, lviii). But the sail of the verse (reminding us that Jonson honoured Marlowe for his mighty line) confers a grace and insolence upon 'the spoils of provinces' not to be found in the matter-of-fact of Pliny's prose, although the phrase itself is translated precisely (*provinciarum scilicet spoliis partae*).

The arts of imitation and allusion are not, as Jonson uses them, parasitic—they renew the life of the imagination both in the past and in the present. As he himself puts it, the first requisites in a poet are 'natural wit' and 'exercise' while the third is:

imitation, *imitatio*, to be able to convert the substance or riches of another poet to his own use. To make choice of one excellent man above the rest, and so to follow him till he grow very he, or so like him as the copy may be mistaken for the principal. Not as a creature that swallows what it takes in, crude, raw, or undigested; but that feeds with an appetite, and hath a stomach to concoct, divide, and turn all into nourishment.

(*Timber or Discoveries* cxxx)

With this in mind one may browse with greater satisfaction in the literature that the play calls into service, finding (for example) that the voices of Horace and Juvenal can be heard the more clearly because Jonson had attended to them.

#### 'THE MANNERS OF THE SCENE'

Jonson studied the theatrical art of the past as exactly as he did its poetry, but both as playwright and as poet he made contributions

Jonson's Comedy: A Gloss on *Volpone*' in *Studies in the English Renaissance Drama*, ed. J. W. Bennett and others, 1959, pp. 310-21.

### A Note on Stage History

*Volpone* was one of the few Jacobean plays to continue to hold the stage in Pepys's time, but by the beginning of the eighteenth century it was in decline; as one writer put it, '*The Mourning Bride, Plain Dealer, Volpone, or Tamerlane*, will hardly fetch us a tolerable audience, unless we stuff the bills with long entertainments of dances, songs, scaramouched entries, and what not.'<sup>17</sup> It seems to have been neglected in the nineteenth century, but was revived in the twentieth with a great performance by Baliol Holloway (*Volpone*) and Ion Swinley (*Mosca*) at the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith in 1921. Among more recent performances the most notable was Donald Wolfitt's with the Advance Players in 1947. A distinguished French film has been made after Stefan Zweig's German adaptation of the play; in it *Mosca* is left in command of *Volpone*'s wealth—ready to spend it—and *Volpone* is outcast, being officially dead and buried.

### THE TEXT AND ITS PRESENTATION

Dr Johnson did well to remark of textual scholars and their craft that where the matter to be investigated is so near to inexistence, its bulk must be enlarged by rage and exclamation. For disputes about the text of *Volpone*—where the points at issue are more than usually trivial—have been uncommonly acrimonious.

The history begins auspiciously, for two admirable, but not impeccable, texts were published in Jonson's lifetime, apparently with his authority and collaboration: the 1607 Quarto, *Volpone or the Foxe*, printed for Thomas Thorpe by an unknown printer; and the version in the great Folio of *Works* printed and published by William Stansby in 1616. Between the Quarto and Folio texts of certain other Jonson plays there are marked discrepancies, but the Folio *Volpone* is almost slavishly faithful to the Quarto, with manifestly purposeful departures or additions numbering only about one hundred.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Quoted from Malcolm Elwin, *The Playgoer's Handbook to Restoration Drama*, 1928, p. 159.

<sup>18</sup> De Vocht, in his edition of the Quarto, estimates 3175 alterations of the Q text in F, but the great majority are trivially typographical; he counts 83 emendations; see de Vocht pp. 245-6.

canopy; Volpone's delighted exclamation then refers to the degrading spectacle that Corvino is presenting. Towards the end of the scene Bonario 'leaps out from where Mosca had placed him'; this could be from the gallery itself (an athletic feat), or he could watch from the gallery, come down unseen, and appear from behind the traverse.

Act IV starts with three unlocated street scenes with the pavilion curtains drawn, but they may open for the remaining scenes to allow the structure to become the judicial seat of the first Avvocato in the Scrutineo.

In the fifth Act the canopy perhaps serves again as Volpone's bed in the first scene, but its dominant function is as setting for another display of Volpone's wealth as Mosca takes its inventory. Volpone's hiding place behind the traverse (which can mean 'screen' as well as 'curtain') would be to one side, while Mosca prevails over gold and gulls from the centre. Scene iv is at Sir Politic's house, but whether in a courtyard or an ante-room is not clear—Peregrine is not apparently admitted to the house, but the merchants 'knock without' at line 47. The canopy stage could serve for Sir Politic's study, and his papers could be burned there as the merchants rush in. Scene v, which is editorially at Volpone's house, need not be localised, and the curtains can remain closed, to open again for the final scenes of justice.

### Costume and Setting

For the general visual impression of the play Mario Praz has made comparisons with Titian, with his portrait of Aretino ('diabolical', 'thrilled by the soul's degradation') and his *mascarone* ('we are in the presence of the same audacious and malignant buffoonery').<sup>16</sup> But for relevant, if rather early, visual impressions of Venice—its costume and architecture—Carpaccio remains the best source for the producer. The extracts from Coryat's *Crudities* given in the appendix may also be found to assist in making the spectacle of the play both accurate and eloquent.

### Music

The most famous song of the play, *Come, my Celia*, was set to music by Ferrabosco and included in his *Book of Ayres*. A facsimile, together with commentary on other aspects of the music of *Volpone*, is included in Willa McClung Evans, *Ben Jonson and Elizabethan Music* (revised edition 1965). See also F. W. Sternfeld, 'Song in

<sup>16</sup> Mario Praz, *The Flaming Heart*, 1958, p. 183.

Jonson's Comedy: A Gloss on *Volpone*' in *Studies in the English Renaissance Drama*, ed. J. W. Bennett and others, 1959, pp. 310-21.

### A Note on Stage History

*Volpone* was one of the few Jacobean plays to continue to hold the stage in Pepys's time, but by the beginning of the eighteenth century it was in decline; as one writer put it, '*The Mourning Bride, Plain Dealer, Volpone, or Tamerlane*, will hardly fetch us a tolerable audience, unless we stuff the bills with long entertainments of dances, songs, scaramouched entries, and what not.'<sup>17</sup> It seems to have been neglected in the nineteenth century, but was revived in the twentieth with a great performance by Baliol Holloway (*Volpone*) and Ion Swinley (*Mosca*) at the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith in 1921. Among more recent performances the most notable was Donald Wolfit's with the Advance Players in 1947. A distinguished French film has been made after Stefan Zweig's German adaptation of the play; in it *Mosca* is left in command of *Volpone*'s wealth—ready to spend it—and *Volpone* is outcast, being officially dead and buried.

### THE TEXT AND ITS PRESENTATION

Dr Johnson did well to remark of textual scholars and their craft that where the matter to be investigated is so near to inexistence, its bulk must be enlarged by rage and exclamation. For disputes about the text of *Volpone*—where the points at issue are more than usually trivial—have been uncommonly acrimonious.

The history begins auspiciously, for two admirable, but not impeccable, texts were published in Jonson's lifetime, apparently with his authority and collaboration: the 1607 Quarto, *Volpone or the Foxe*, printed for Thomas Thorpe by an unknown printer; and the version in the great Folio of *Works* printed and published by William Stansby in 1616. Between the Quarto and Folio texts of certain other Jonson plays there are marked discrepancies, but the Folio *Volpone* is almost slavishly faithful to the Quarto, with manifestly purposeful departures or additions numbering only about one hundred.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Quoted from Malcolm Elwin, *The Playgoer's Handbook to Restoration Drama*, 1928, p. 159.

<sup>18</sup> De Vocht, in his edition of the Quarto, estimates 3175 alterations of the Q text in F, but the great majority are trivially typographical; he counts 83 emendations; see de Vocht pp. 245-6.



A comma in Jonson does not require a pause, but it gives the interpreting actor opportunity for one. For example, these lines of Mosca to Voltore are capable of a choice of renderings:

You still are, what you were, sir. Only you,  
Of all the rest, are he, commands his love:  
And you do wisely, to preserve it, thus,  
With early visitation, and kind notes  
Of your good meaning to him, which, I know,  
Cannot but come most grateful.

(I.iii, 1-6)

The first sentence may be spoken as if it were free from commas, allowing them merely to mark the grammatical structure ('what you were' being a subordinate clause); but if the pauses are observed, the clause begins to sound ironic and equivocal, as if Mosca hesitates to say what Voltore really is. Similarly, observing the pause after 'he' gives a particular force to 'commands', but the reader or actor is not bound to observe it. Again, a pause after 'preserve it' and after 'thus', would enable Mosca to make the gift of the plate more important than the visitation. Mosca's subtle rhetoric, therefore, is well served by this mode of punctuation; although it remains vital not to over-interpret, but to allow easy and rapid movement over the commas when occasion requires.

In the passage quoted above, the words 'Of all the rest' are enclosed in brackets in Q and F. Where modern practice allows three parenthesising devices—commas, brackets and dashes, Jonson was apt to use only the last two. This edition substitutes commas for brackets for the more open kind of parenthesis, where there is only a slight diversion from the run of the thought; but Jonson's brackets are retained when they enclose a secondary or supplementary observation:

No, sir, on visitation:

(I'll tell you how, anon) and, staying long,  
The youth, he grows impatient, rushes forth.

(III.ix, 45-7)

Dashes are retained where they occur, and are occasionally substituted for Jonson's brackets—particularly in asides and interruptions.

In both texts Jonson makes lavish use of semi-colons and colons, when where modern practice would call for a full stop. These have been retained unless they fall at the end of speeches, or of interjections or commands, when stops or exclamation marks are substituted. The colon in Jonson often expresses the climax of a movement of thought, returning the clause or sentence that follows:

He knows no man.

He has no friend, nor mine of no  
Whom you should not bid last, or go

(I.v, 39-43)

I still interpreted the nods, he made  
(Through weakenesse) for consent: (35-6)

Faith, I could stifle him, rarely, with a pillow,  
As well, as any woman, that should keep him. (68-9)

VOLPONE Not, now.  
Some three hours, hence—  
MOSCA I told the squire, so much. (98)

Elsewhere, a very few commas have been added to secure consistency (which Jonson himself sought) in the presentation of some phrases (e.g. 'Pray you,') and forms of address (e.g. 'Sir,'). The edition remains, however, as conservative of the Quarto and Folio punctuation as the circumstances of a modernised text permit.

## Stage Directions

The Quarto is without stage-directions but the Folio adds twenty-nine, usually of an innocent if superfluous character—indicating knocking at the door, Celia's casting her handkerchief from the window, Volpone peeping from behind a traverse, etc. I share de Vocht's view that the directions are either unnecessary or inadequate, and I do not think they can be confidently attributed to Jonson. On the other hand, they cannot plausibly be ascribed to anyone else, and it seems likely that he at least tolerated them, as he might otherwise have had them removed from the Folio margins. It would be possible to speculate about the publisher, William Stansby, himself reading and annotating the Quarto that Jonson had marked, or was to mark, for the press; but there is no sufficient evidence, and to set aside the directions would be an impertinence.

The Folio directions have been retained, but transferred from the margins into the body of the text; where they are likely to be confused with the text they are enclosed in round brackets. In both Q and F the names of characters playing in a scene are listed together at

its head, without indication in the text of specific entrances and exits; these indications, together with other editorial directions (often derived from the 1640 Folio and from Gifford's 1816 edition), are enclosed in square brackets.

### Quarto and Folio Variants

All verbal variants (i.e. those affecting the choice of form of a word) are recorded in the appended list, and most of them also in the page-notes. Only a selection of punctuation variants is included, however, to indicate the nature of the relationship between the two texts, and to enable the reader in special instances to make his own choice.<sup>24</sup>

### Act and Scene Divisions

The Act and scene divisions, common to Q and F, are retained except for the correction of some errors in numbering. They often bring no break in the action, but with the entrance of major characters, they usually signify a turn of events.

<sup>24</sup> See below pp. 169-70.

## A NOTE ON THE NOTES

THROUGHOUT the notes this edition is indebted to those that others have prepared: William Gifford (1816), W. Bang (1908), J. D. Rea (1919), Herford and Simpson (1937, 1950), Henry de Vocht (1937), David Cook (1962) and Alvin B. Kernan (1962). The scope of the edition does not permit more than a very few specific acknowledgements, but the reader who wishes for fuller information on contemporary and literary allusions will usually find it in Herford and Simpson Vol. IX (1950). There is little here that is original; the aim has been the more modest one of relevance and economy.

Since so many words have called for both lexical gloss and comment, there has been no attempt to discriminate the two kinds by a line across the foot-notes (as used in some other plays of the series); a line is only used for the convenience of isolating the few very long notes.

Paraphrase and gloss should not, of course, be taken as full equivalents of the words annotated. Where, for example, 'forged practice' is glossed as 'contrived plot' (IV.v, 85), 'baited' as 'enticed' (IV.v, 146), and 'fleshed' as 'inured' (IV.vi, 51), the limited equivalences of meaning should not be allowed to mask the crucial differences of effect and energy. Many of the glosses are from the Oxford English Dictionary which, indeed, makes a better companion to the play than most commentators. Inverted commas enclose a gloss in which a meaning is indirectly rendered or paraphrased. No attempt has been made at total consistency in the glosses: some equivalents can be substituted in context for the glossed word, and others cannot; some words are glossed twice (because unlikely to be remembered), others at their first appearance only; and the Latin root of a word is given only when it is of particular relevance.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

MY LARGE DEBT is to the comprehensive work of C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, to the textual analysis of the Quarto offered by Henry de Vocht, and to editors of modernised texts from William Gifford (1816) to A. B. Kernan (1962). Some other specific acknowledgements are made in the notes, but I am aware of their inadequacy and am confident that they will not be mistaken for the sum of my obligations. My colleagues Dr Brian Morris, Dr Brian Gibbons, Mr Bob Jones and Mr Bernard Harris have generously contributed facts and ideas; if I have not always enlisted them in the service of truth, the fault is not theirs. I am grateful to Mr David Crease who made the drawing for Figure 1.

The section on 'The Author' in the introduction is from Professor W. F. Bolton's edition of *Sejanus*.

## FURTHER READING

### Editions

*Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford, Percy Simpson and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols., 1925-52. The standard edition.

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# VOLPONE, OR THE FOXE.

*A Comædie.*

Acted in the yeere 1605. By  
the K. MAJESTIES  
SERVANTS.

The Author B. I.

HORAT.

*Simul & iocunda, & idonea dicere vita.*

---

LONDON,  
Printed by WILLIAM STANSBY.

---

M. DC. XVI.

BEN: IONSON

his

VOLPONE

Or

THE FOXE.

— *Simul Giucunda, & idonea dicere vita.*

Printed for *Thomas Thorppe.*

1607.

TO  
THE MOST  
NOBLE AND  
MOST EQVALL  
SISTERS

*THE TWO FAMOUS*  
VNIVERSITIES  
FOR THEIR LOVE

AND  
ACCEPTANCE  
*SHewn TO HIS POEME IN THE*  
PRESENTATION

BEN. IONSON

THE GRATEFVLL ACKNOWLEDGER  
DEDICATES  
*BOTH IT AND HIMSELFE.*





## THE EPISTLE

Never (most equal Sisters) had any man a wit so presently  
 excellent, as that it could raise itself; but there must come both  
 matter, occasion, commenders, and favourers to it: if this be  
 true, and that the fortune of all writers doth daily prove it, it  
 behoves the careful to provide, well, towards these accidents; 5  
 and, having acquired them, to preserve that part of reputation  
 most tenderly, wherein the benefit of a friend is also defended.  
 Hence is it, that I now render myself grateful, and am studious  
 to justify the bounty of your act: to which, though your mere  
 authority were satisfying, yet, it being an age, wherein *Poetry*, 10  
 and the professors of it hear so ill, on all sides, there will a  
 reason be looked for in the subject. It is certain, nor can it with  
 any forehead be opposed, that the too-much licence of  
*Poetasters*, in this time, hath much deformed their mistress;  
 that, every day, their manifold, and manifest ignorance, doth 15  
 stick unnatural reproaches upon her: but for their petulancy, it  
 were an act of the greatest injustice, either to let the learned  
 suffer; or so divine a skill (which indeed should not be attempted  
 with unclean hands) to fall, under the least contempt. For,

- 1 *equal* in merit, in justice (Latin *aequus*), and perhaps in rivalry
- 1 *wit* talent
- 1 *presently* instantly
- 4 *that* i.e. 'that it be so'
- 5 *accidents* chances, secondary attributes
- 7 *benefit . . . friend* i.e. the good of the universities
- 11 *professors* practitioners
- 11 *hear so ill* are spoken so ill of (Latin *tam male audiunt*)
- 12 *subject* i.e. poetry (it must justify itself)
- 13 *forehead* confidence, countenance
- 14 *Poetasters* 'a petty or paltry poet' (*OED*)
- 16 *for* because of
- 16 *petulancy* rudeness, insolence

---

*The Epistle.* The so-called War of the Theatres in which Jonson's principal opponents were Dekker and Marston had virtually ended in 1604, when Jonson and Dekker collaborated in a Coronation Entertainment, and Marston dedicated his *Malcontent* to Jonson ('*Poetae Elegantissimo Gravissimo*'). The present Epistle, however, takes over material from the *Apologetical Dialogue* which was once spoken on the stage and was intended for inclusion in the 1602 edition of *Poetaster*—hence some surviving acerbities of tone. The critical principles of the Epistle are touched on in the Introduction.

if men will impartially, and not asquint, look toward the offices, and function of a Poet, they will easily conclude to themselves, the impossibility of any man's being a good Poet, without first being a good man. He that is said to be able to inform young men to all good disciplines, inflame grown men to all great virtues, keep old men in their best and supreme state, or as they decline to childhood, recover them to their first strength; that comes forth the interpreter, and arbiter of nature, a teacher of things divine, no less than human, a master in manners; and can alone (or with a few) effect the business of mankind: this, I take him, is no subject for pride, and ignorance to exercise their railing rhetoric upon. But, it will here be hastily answered, that the writers of these days are other things; that, not only their manners, but their natures are inverted; and nothing remaining with them of the dignity of Poet, but the abused name, which every scribe usurps: that now, especially in *dramatic*, or (as they term it) *stage poetry*, nothing but ribaldry, profanation, blasphemy, all licence of offence to God, and man, is practised. I dare not deny a great part of this (and am sorry, I dare not) because in some men's abortive features (and would they had never boasted the light) it is over-true: but, that all are embarked in this bold adventure for hell, is a most uncharitable thought, and, uttered, a more malicious slander. For my particular, I can (and from a most clear conscience) affirm, that I have ever trembled to think toward the least profaneness; have loathed the use of such foul, and unwashed bawdry, as is now made the food of the *scene*. And, howsoever I cannot escape, from some, the imputation of sharpness, but that they will say, I have taken a pride, or lust, to be bitter, and not my youngest infant but hath come into the world with all his teeth; I would ask of these supercilious politics, what nation, society, or general order, or state I have provoked? What public person? Whether I have not (in all these) preserved their dignity, as mine own person, safe? My works are read, allowed (I speak of those that are entirely mine) —look into them: what broad reproofs have I used? Where have I been particular? Where personal? except to a mimic, cheater, bawd, or buffoon—creatures (for their insolencies)

24 *inform shape*

29 *business proper functions*

40 *abortive features* miscarried creations—bad plays

49 *youngest infant* i.e. latest play—*Sejanus*

50–51 *politics* contrivers

55 *broad* licentious

56 *mimic actor, imitator*

worthy to be taxed? Yet, to which of these so pointingly, as he might not, either ingenuously have confessed, or wisely dissembled his disease? But it is not rumour can make men guilty, much less entitle me, to other men's crimes. I know, that nothing can be so innocently writ, or carried, but may be made obnoxious to construction; marry, whilst I bear mine innocence about me, I fear it not. Application is now grown a trade with many; and there are, that profess to have a key for the deciphering of everything: but let wise and noble persons take heed how they be too credulous, or give leave to these invading interpreters, to be over-familiar with their fames, who cunningly, and often, utter their own virulent malice, under other men's simplest meanings. As for those, that will (by faults which charity hath raked up, or common honesty concealed) make themselves a name with the multitude, or (to draw their rude, and beastly claps) care not whose living faces they intrench, with their petulant styles; may they do it, without a rival, for me: I choose rather to live graved in obscurity, than share with them, in so preposterous a fame. Nor can I blame the wishes of those severe, and wiser patriots, who, providing the hurts these licentious spirits may do in a state, desire rather to see fools, and devils, and those antique relics of barbarism retrieved, with all other ridiculous and exploded follies: than behold the wounds of private men, of princes, and nations. For, as Horace makes Trebatius speak, among these,

—*Sibi quisque timet, quamquam est intactus, et odit.*

- 58 *taxed* censured                      58 Yet F (Q Or)  
 59 *ingenuously* F (Q ingeniously) evidently a correction  
 62 *carried* conducted  
 62-63 *made . . . construction* 'made harmful by misinterpretation' or 'exposed to attack by misinterpretation'  
 64 *Application* i.e. of fiction to fact  
 69 *utter* in the sense 'pass false coin'  
 71 *raked up* raked over  
 77 *severe* F (Q grave) perhaps Q compositor's error influenced by 'grav'd, or Q corrected to avoid the chime  
 77 *patriots* fellow countrymen  
 77 *providing* foreseeing  
 79 *fools, and devils* figures in the old moralities and interludes  
 79 *antique* perhaps 'antic', grotesque  
 80 *exploded* clapped and hooted off the stage (OED)  
 82 *among* F (Q in)  
 83 *Sibi . . . odit* Horace, *Satires* II. i, 23, translated by Jonson: 'In satires, each man, though untouched, complains As he were hurt; and hates such biting strains' (*Poetaster* III. v, 41)

And men may justly impute such rages, if continued, to the  
 writer, as his sports. The increase of which lust in liberty, 85  
 together with the present trade of the stage, in all their  
 misc'line *interludes*, what learned or liberal soul doth not  
 already abhor?—where nothing but the filth of the time is  
 uttered, and that with such impropriety of phrase, such plenty 90  
 of *solecisms*, such dearth of sense, so bold *prolepses*, so racked  
*metaphors*, with brothelry, able to violate the ear of a pagan, and  
 blasphemy to turn the blood of a Christian to water. I cannot  
 but be serious in a cause of this nature, wherein my fame, and  
 the reputations of divers honest and learned are the question; 95  
 when a name, so full of authority, antiquity, and all great mark,  
 is (through their insolence) become the lowest scorn of the  
 age: and those men subject to the petulancy of every vernacu-  
 lous orator that were wont to be the care of Kings, and happiest  
 Monarchs. This it is, that hath not only rapt me to present 100  
 indignation, but made me studious heretofore; and by all my  
 actions to stand off, from them; which may most appear in this  
 my latest work (which you, most learned *Arbitresses*, have seen,  
 judged, and to my crown, approved) wherein I have laboured,  
 for their instruction, and amendment, to reduce not only the 105  
 ancient forms, but manners of the *scene*, the easiness, the pro-  
 priety, the innocence, and last the doctrine, which is the  
 principal end of *poesie*, to inform men, in the best reason of  
 living. And though my *catastrophe* may, in the strict rigour of  
*comic* law, meet with censure, as turning back to my promise; I 110  
 desire the learned, and charitable critic to have so much faith  
 in me, to think it was done of industry. For, with what ease I  
 could have varied it, nearer his scale (but that I fear to boast  
 my own faculty) I could here insert. But my special aim being  
 to put the snaffle in their mouths that cry out, we never  
 punish vice in our interludes, &c., I took the more liberty; 115  
 though not without some lines of example, drawn even in the  
 ancients themselves, the goings out of whose comedies are not

87 *misc'line* miscellane, jumbled (Latin *ludi miscelli*)

88 *filth* F (Q garbage)

95 *a name* i.e. 'poet', or specifically Horace, Jonson's voice in *The Poetaster* and his attributed name in Dekker's *Satiromastix*

97–98 *vernaculous* low-bred, scurrilous (Latin *vernaculus*, of home-born slaves)

99 *rapt me* carried me away

104 *reduce* restore (Latin *reduco*) 108 *catastrophe* dénouement

111 *of industry* deliberately (of ed. FQ off)

117 *goings out* endings

always joyful, but oft-times, the bawds, the servants, the rivals,  
 yea, and the masters are mulcted: and fitly, it being the office of  
 a *comic-Poet* to imitate justice, and instruct to life, as well as  
 purity of language, or stir up gentle affections. To which, I  
 shall take the occasion elsewhere to speak. For the present  
 (most revered Sisters) as I have cared to be thankful for  
 your affections past, and here made the understanding ac-  
 quainted with some ground of your favours; let me not despair  
 their continuance, to the maturing of some worthier fruits:  
 wherein, if my *Muses* be true to me, I shall raise the despised  
 head of *Poetry* again, and stripping her out of those rotten and  
 base rags, wherewith the Times have adulterated her form,  
 restore her to her primitive habit, feature and majesty, and  
 render her worthy to be embraced, and kissed, of all the great  
 and master-spirits of our world. As for the vile, and slothful,  
 who never affected an act worthy of celebration, or are so inward  
 with their own vicious natures, as they worthily fear her; and  
 think it a high point of policy, to keep her in contempt with  
 their declamatory, and windy invectives: she shall out of just  
 rage incite her servants (who are *genus irritabile*) to spout ink in  
 their faces, that shall eat, farther than their marrow, into their  
 fames; and not Cinnamus the barber, with his art, shall be able  
 to take out the brands, but they shall live, and be read, till the  
 wretches die, as things worst deserving of themselves in chief,  
 and then of all mankind.

*From my house in the Black-Friars  
 this 11. of February. 1607*

- 121 *purity of language* governed by 'instruct to', but the construction  
 falters in the next clause  
 122 *elsewhere* i.e. in his lost commentary on Horace's *Art of Poetry*  
 124 *the understanding* i.e. men of understanding  
 133 *affected* 'liked' or 'pretended to'  
 139 *Cinnamus* surgeon-barber celebrated by Martial (VI. lxiv, 26) for  
 his skill in removing *stigmata*  
 141 *in chief* in the first place  
 143 *From . . . 1607 Q* (F omits)  
 143 *Blackfriars* the centre of London's private theatres



## THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

VOLPONE, a Magnifico  
 MOSCA, his Parasite  
 VOLTORE, an Advocate  
 CORBACCIO, an old Gentleman

CORVINO, a Merchant  
 AVOCATORI, four Magistrates  
 NOTARIO, the Register  
 NANO, a Dwarf  
 CASTRONE, an Eunuch  
 GREGE [a crowd]

SIR POLITIC WOULD-BE, a Knight  
 PEREGRINE, a Gentleman-traveller  
 BONARIO, a young Gentleman  
 FINE MADAME WOULD-BE, the  
     Knight's wife  
 CELIA, the Merchant's wife  
 COMMANDADORI, Officers  
 MERCATORI, three Merchants  
 ANDROGYNO, a Hermaphrodite  
 SERVITORE, a Servant  
 WOMEN

### The Scene: VENICE

VOLPONE 'an old fox, an old reinard, an old craftie, slie, subtle companion, sneaking lurking wily deceiver' (Florio, *A Worlde of Wordes* 1598)

MAGNIFICO magnate of Venice

MOSCA 'any kind of flye' (Florio); Beelzebub, the 'Prince of Devils', is in Hebrew 'the Lord of the flies'

VOLTORE 'a ravenous bird called a vultur, a geyre or grap. Also a greedie cormorant' (Florio)

CORBACCIO 'a filthie great raven' (Florio)

CORVINO crow; 'of a ravens nature or colour' (Florio 1611)

AVOCATORI state prosecutors

REGISTER clerk of the court

NANO Latin *nanus* a dwarf

PEREGRINE a hawk; a traveller

ANDROGYNO from Greek forms *andros* (man) and *gyne* (woman)

*The Scene* VENICE F (Q omits)





# VOLPONE, OR THE FOXE

## The Argument

V O L P O N E , childless, rich, feigns sick, despairs,  
O ffers his state to hopes of several heirs,  
L ies languishing; his Parasite receives  
P resents of all, assures, deludes: then weaves  
O ther cross-plots, which ope themselves, are told. 5  
N ew tricks for safety are sought; they thrive; when, bold,  
E ach tempts th'other again, and all are sold.

## Prologue

Now, luck yet send us, and a little wit  
Will serve, to make our play hit;  
According to the palates of the season,  
Here is rime, not empty of reason: 5  
This we were bid to credit from our Poet,  
Whose true scope, if you would know it,  
In all his poems, still, hath been this measure,  
To mix profit with your pleasure;  
And not as some (whose throats their envy failing)  
Cry hoarsely, 'All he writes, is railing.' 10  
And when his plays come forth, think they can flout them,  
With saying, 'He was a year about them.'  
To these there needs no lie, but this his creature,  
Which was, two months since, no feature;  
And, though he dares give them five lives to mend it, 15  
'Tis known, five weeks fully penned it;  
From his own hand, without a coadjutor,  
Novice, journeyman, or tutor.  
Yet, thus much I can give you, as a token 20  
Of his play's worth: no eggs are broken,

*Argument* the acrostic form is imitated from Plautus; *The Alchemist* also has one

2 state estate

1 yet F (Q God)

9 as some specifically Marston in *The Dutch Curtesan* (prologue)

12 a year 'you nasty tortoise, you and your itchy poetry break out like Christmas, but once a year' (*Satiromastix* V. ii, 217)

17 coadjutor Jonson worked with collaborators on *Eastward Ho*

18 journeyman qualified craftsman, more than novice but less than master

Nor quaking custards with fierce teeth affrighted,  
 Wherewith your rout are so delighted;  
 Nor haies he in a gull, old ends reciting,  
 To stop gaps in his loose writing, 25  
 With such a deal of monstrous, and forced action;  
 As might make Bet'lem a faction;  
 Nor made he his play, for jests, stol'n from each table,  
 But makes jests, to fit his fable.  
 And, so presents quick *comedy*, refined, 30  
 As best critics have designed;  
 The laws of time, place, persons he observeth,  
 From no needful rule he swerveth.  
 All gall, and copperas, from his ink, he draineth,  
 Only, a little salt remaineth,  
 Wherewith, he'll rub your cheeks, till, red with laughter, 35  
 They shall look fresh, a week after.

### Act I, Scene i

[VOLPONE'S house]

[Enter] VOLPONE, MOSCA

VOLPONE

Good morning to the day; and, next, my gold!  
 Open the shrine, that I may see my saint.

[MOSCA reveals the treasure]

Hail the world's soul, and mine! More glad than is

21 *quaking custards* cowards, so taunted by Marston *Satire* II. iv; also perhaps custard-pie comedy, based on sport with huge custard at the Lord Mayor's feast

23 *gull* dupe, one who swallows anything (from gull = gorge)

23 *ends* tags

26 *make Bet'lem a faction* either 'make a party for the madhouse' or 'enlist the support of the madhouse'; Bet'lem, or Bedlam, was the asylum of St. Mary of Bethlehem

28 *fable* plot 29 *quick* lively

33 *gall, and copperas* oak galls and iron sulphate, used to make ink; rancour was attributed to the gall-bladder and copperas is bitter

34 *salt* is not used in ink, but iron sulphate was called 'salt of iron' and Jonson needs it to introduce the following joke out of Horace (*Satires* I. x, 3)

2 *shrine* Volpone is at his devotions and the treasure has the aspect of a holy reliquary

3 *world's soul* with a pun on 'sol', the sun; also perhaps the coin (see IV. v, 96-97)

The teeming earth to see the longed-for sun  
 Peep through the horns of the celestial Ram, 5  
 Am I, to view thy splendour, darkening his;  
 That, lying here, amongst my other hoards,  
 Show'st like a flame, by night; or like the day  
 Struck out of Chaos, when all darkness fled 10  
 Unto the centre. O, thou sun of Sol,  
 But brighter than thy father, let me kiss,  
 With adoration, thee, and every relic  
 Of sacred treasure, in this blessed room.  
 Well did wise Poets, by thy glorious name  
 Title that age, which they would have the best; 15  
 Thou being the best of things; and far transcending  
 All style of joy in children, parents, friends,  
 Or any other waking dream on earth.  
 Thy looks when they to Venus did ascribe,  
 They should have given her twenty thousand Cupids; 20  
 Such are thy beauties, and our loves! Dear *saint*,  
 Riches, the dumb god, that giv'st all men tongues;  
 That canst do nought, and yet mak'st men do all things;  
 The price of souls; even hell, with thee to boot, 25  
 Is made worth heaven! Thou art virtue, fame,  
 Honour. and all things else! Who can get thee,  
 He shall be noble, valiant, honest, wise—

MOSCA

And what he will, sir. Riches are in fortune  
 A greater good, than wisdom is in nature.

VOLPONE

True, my beloved Mosca. Yet, I glory 30  
 More in the cunning purchase of my wealth,  
 Than in the glad possession; since I gain  
 No common way: I use no trade, no venture;

- 5 *celestial Ram* the sun enters Aries at the spring equinox  
 8-9 *day . . . Chaos* the first day of creation (*Genesis* I.2-4)  
 10 *sun of Sol* alchemy held gold to be the offspring of the sun  
 12 *relic* i.e. the kind found in a shrine  
 15 *that age* the Golden Age (described by Ovid, *Met.* I.89-112)  
 19 *Venus . . . ascribe* following Homeric tradition the Latin poets  
 often called Venus 'golden' (*aurca*)  
 22 *the dumb god* 'silence is golden'  
 25-27 *Thou art . . . wise* compare Horace, *Satires* II. iii, 94  
 28-29 *Riches . . . nature* 'Better to be endowed by chance with riches  
 than by nature with wisdom'  
 31 *purchase* procurance

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 Wherewith your rout are so delighted;  
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28-29 *Riches . . . nature* 'Better to be endowed by chance with riches  
than by nature with wisdom'

31 *purchase* procurance

I wound no earth with ploughshares; fat no beasts  
 To feed the shambles; have no mills for iron, 35  
 Oil, corn, or men, to grind 'em into poulder;  
 I blow no subtle glass; expose no ships  
 To threat'nings of the furrow-faced sea;  
 I turn no moneys, in the public bank;  
 Nor usure private—

MOSCA No, sir, nor devour 40  
 Soft prodigals. You shall ha' some will swallow  
 A melting heir, as glibly as your Dutch  
 Will pills of butter, and ne'er purge for't.  
 Tear forth the fathers of poor families  
 Out of their beds, and coffin them alive 45  
 In some kind, clasping prison, where their bones  
 May be forth-coming, when the flesh is rotten:  
 But your sweet nature doth abhor these courses;  
 You loathe, the widow's, or the orphan's tears  
 Should wash your pavements; or their piteous cries 50  
 Ring in your roofs; and beat the air, for vengeance—

VOLPONE

Right, Mosca, I do loathe it.

MOSCA

And besides, sir,

You are not like the thresher, that doth stand  
 With a huge flail, watching a heap of corn,  
 And, hungry, dares not taste the smallest grain, 55  
 But feeds on mallows, and such bitter herbs;  
 Not like the merchant, who hath filled his vaults  
 With Romagna, and rich Candian wines,  
 Yet drinks the lees of Lombard's vinegar;  
 You will not lie in straw, whilst moths, and worms 60  
 Feed on your sumptuous hangings, and soft beds.  
 You know the use of riches, and dare give, now,

35 *shambles* slaughterhouse

36 *grind 'em* i.e. exploit the men; compare *New Inn* II. v, 119 'His mills, to grind his servants into powder'

37 *subtle* tenuous, delicate; Venice was famed for its glass

39 *turn* exchange

40 *usure* exchange at high interest

40 *private* privately

42-43 *Dutch . . . butter* a notorious Dutch weakness; compare *Every Man In* III. iv, 42

53 *the thresher* from Horace, *Satires* II. iii, 111

58 *Romagnia* Rumney, a sweet Greek wine

58 *Candian wines* Malmsey from Candy (Crete)

From that bright heap, to me, your poor observer,  
 Or to your dwarf, or your hermaphrodite,  
 Your eunuch, or what other household trifle 65  
 Your pleasure allows maintenance—  
 VOLPONE Hold thee, Mosca,

[*Gives him money*]

Take, of my hand; thou strik'st on truth, in all:  
 And they are envious term thee parasite.  
 Call forth my dwarf, my eunuch, and my fool,  
 And let 'em make me sport. What should I do, 70  
 But cocker up my *genius*, and live free  
 To all delights, my fortune calls me to?  
 I have no wife, no parent, child, ally,  
 To give my substance to; but whom I make  
 Must be my heir: and this makes men observe me. 75  
 This draws new clients, daily, to my house,  
 Women, and men, of every sex and age,  
 That bring me presents, send me plate, coin, jewels,  
 With hope, that when I die (which they expect  
 Each greedy minute) it shall then return, 80  
 Tenfold, upon them; whilst some, covetous  
 Above the rest, seek to engross me, whole,  
 And counter-work, the one, unto the other,  
 Contend in gifts, as they would seem, in love:  
 All which I suffer, playing with their hopes, 85  
 And am content to coin 'em into profit,  
 And look upon their kindness, and take more,  
 And look on that; still bearing them in hand,  
 Letting the cherry knock against their lips,  
 And, draw it, by their mouths, and back again. How now! 90

66 *Hold thee keep for yourself*

71 *cocker up* pamper, indulge (Latin *indulgere genio*)

75 *observe* 'treat with ceremonious respect or reverence' (OED)

76 *clients* followers who wait upon the patronage of Volpone the Magnifico (ironic)

88 *still* continually

88 *bearing* . . . *hand* leading them on

89 *cherry* in the game of chop-cherry the player tried to bite a dangling cherry



## Act I, Scene ii

[Enter MOSCA, with NANO, ANDROGYNO, and CASTRONE]  
[An entertainment follows]

NANO

Now, room for fresh gamesters, who do will you to know,  
They do bring you neither play, nor University show;  
And therefore do intreat you, that whatsoever they rehearse,  
May not fare a whit the worse, for the false pace of the  
verse.

If you wonder at this, you will wonder more, ere we pass, 5  
For know [*Pointing to ANDROGYNO*], here is enclosed the  
Soul of Pythagoras,

That juggler divine, as hereafter shall follow;

Which soul, fast and loose, sir, came first from Apollo,  
And was breathed into Aethalides, Mercurius his son,  
Where it had the gift to remember all that ever was done. 10

From thence it fled forth, and made quick transmigration  
To goldy-locked Euphorbus, who was killed, in good  
fashion,

At the siege of old Troy, by the cuckold of Sparta.

Hermotimus was next (I find it in my charta)  
To whom it did pass, where no sooner it was missing, 15  
But with one Pyrrhus, of Delos, it learned to go a fishing:

3 *rehearse* recite

4 *false pace* exemplified by Nano as he speaks; the old-fashioned loose four-stress rhythm, with forced rhymes, falsifies the natural sense

6 *Pythagoras* for other glimpses of 'metempsychosis' or transmigration of the soul, see *Twelfth Night* IV. ii, 57-64, and *Dr. Faustus* V. ii, 172-174. The history of his own soul is told by Lucian, 'Dialogue of the Cobbler and the Cock' and by Diogenes Laertius (see Introduction, p. xxi)

8 *fast and loose* 'slippery, hard to catch', from a betting game in which one player guessed whether or not a dagger was held fast in a belt intricately folded by the other

9 *Aethalides* herald to the Argonauts and heir to an omniscient memory

12 *Euphorbus* the Trojan who first wounded Patroclus (*Iliad* 17)

13 *cuckold of Sparta* Menelaus

14 *Hermotimus* a Greek philosopher

14 *charta* paper, perhaps Lucian's dialogue

16 *Pyrrhus, of Delos* a philosopher; the name and the allusion to fishing are supplied by Diogenes Laertius without explanation

And thence did it enter the Sophist of Greece.

From Pythagore, she went into a beautiful piece,  
Hight Aspasia, the meretrix; and the next toss of her

Was, again, of a whore, she became a philosopher, 20  
Crates the Cynic: as itself does relate it.

Since, kings, knights, and beggars, knaves, lords and fools  
gat it,

Besides, ox, and ass, camel, mule, goat, and brock,  
In all which it hath spoke, as in the cobbler's cock.

But I come not here, to discourse of that matter, 25

Or his one, two, or three, or his great oath, 'By Quater!'

His musics, his trigon, his golden thigh,

Or his telling how elements shift; but I

Would ask, how of late, thou hast suffered translation,

And shifted thy coat, in these days of reformation? 30

ANDROGYNO

Like one of the reformèd, a fool, as you see,

Counting all old doctrine heresy.

NANO

But not on thine own forbid meats hast thou ventured?

ANDROGYNO

On fish, when first, a Carthusian I entered.

NANO

Why, then thy dogmatical silence hath left thee? 35

ANDROGYNO

Of that an obstreperous lawyer bereft me.

17 *Sophist of Greece* Pythagoras is so styled by Lucian

19 *Hight* (Old English) named, called *Aspasia* mistress of Pericles

19 *meretrix* courtesan 21 *Crates* a pupil of Diogenes

21 *itself* either the cock in Lucian, or Androgyno

24 *cobbler's cock* the cock tells the story in Lucian

26 *Quater* the Pythagorean trigon or triangle of four, symbol of  
cosmic and moral harmony: ∴

27 *musics* Pythagorean theory related the spacing of the cosmic  
spheres to the laws of harmony

27 *golden thigh* attributed to Pythagoras by his followers

30 *reformation* the Protestant reformation; Jonson was still a  
Catholic in 1606

31 *reformèd* evidently the Puritans

33 *forbid meats* forbidden foods; Pythagoreans were forbidden fish  
and beans

34 *Carthusian* an order strict in its diet but allowing fish

35 *dogmatical silence* Pythagoreans were enjoined to a five-year  
silence, which might have been maintained among the Carthusians

36 *obstreperous* vociferous

NANO

O wonderful changel when Sir Lawyer forsook thee,  
For Pythagore's sake, what body then took thee?

ANDROGYNO

A good dull moyle.

NANO

And how! by that means,

Thou wert brought to allow of the eating of beans?

40

ANDROGYNO

Yes.

NANO But, from the moyle, into whom did'st thou pass?

ANDROGYNO

Into a very strange beast, by some writers called an ass;

By others, a precise, pure, illuminate brother,

Of those devour flesh, and sometimes one another;

And will drop forth a libel, or a sanctified lie,

45

Betwixt every spoonful of a nativity-pie.

NANO

Now quit thee, for heaven, of that profane nation;

And gently, report thy next transmigration.

ANDROGYNO

To the same that I am.

NANO

A creature of delight?

And, what is more than a fool, an hermaphrodite?

50

Now pray thee, sweet soul, in all thy variation,

Which body would'st thou choose, to take up thy station?

ANDROGYNO

Troth, this I am in, even here would I tarry.

NANO

'Cause here, the delight of each sex thou canst vary?

ANDROGYNO

Alas, those pleasures be stale, and forsaken;

55

No, 'tis your fool, wherewith I am so taken;

The only one creature, that I can call blessed,

For all other forms I have proved most distressed.

NANO

Spoke true, as thou wert in Pythagoras still.

This learned opinion we celebrate will,

60

Fellow cunuch, as behoves us, with all our wit and art,

39 *moyle* mule43 *precise* 'strict in religious observance, puritanical' (OED)43 *illuminate* visionary46 *nativity-pie* Christmas pie, evading the word 'mass', see *The Alchemist* III. ii, 43

To dignify that whereof our selves are so great, and  
special a part.

VOLPONE

Now very, very pretty! Mosca, this  
Was thy invention?

MOSCA

If it please my patron,

Not else.

VOLPONE It doth, good Mosca.

MOSCA

Then it was, sir.

65

*Song*

Fools, they are the only nation  
Worth men's envy, or admiration;  
Free from care, or sorrow-taking,  
Selves, and others merry making:  
All they speak, or do, is sterling.  
Your Fool, he is your great man's darling,  
And your ladies' sport, and pleasure;  
Tongue, and bable are his treasure.  
E'en his face begetteth laughter,  
And he speaks truth, free from slaughter;  
He's the grace of every feast,  
And, sometimes, the chiefest guest;  
Hath his trencher, and his stool,  
When wit waits upon the fool.

70

75

80

O, who would not be  
He, he, he?

*One knocks without*

VOLPONE

Who's that? Away!

[*Exeunt NANO, CASTRONE*]

Look Mosca!

MOSCA

Fool, begone!

[*Exit ANDROGYNO*]

'Tis Signior Voltore, the advocate;  
I know him, by his knock.

62 *that* i.e. folly

66 *Song* it might be sung by the grotesques, by Mosca alone, or by all

67 *nation* sect

71 *sterling* capable of standing every test

74 *bable* the fool's bauble or sceptre; slang for phallus

76 *free from slaughter* without being called to account; Marston  
mocked Jonson for rhyming laughter/slaughter (*The Fawn* IV. i),  
but compare the fool's song in *Lear* I. iv, 340; fool's licence?

80 *wit* . . . *fool* the fool dines off his host; wit waits upon the fool's  
words

VOLPONE                                      Fetch me my gown,                                      85  
 My furs, and night caps; say, my couch is changing:  
 And let him entertain himself, awhile,  
 Without i' th' gallery. Now, now, my clients  
 Begin their visitation! vulture, kite,  
 Raven, and gor-crow, all my birds of prey,                                      90  
 That think me turning carcass, now they come.  
 I am not for 'em yet. How now? the news? [*Enter MOSCA*]

MOSCA

A piece of plate, sir.

VOLPONE                                      Of what bigness?

MOSCA

Huge,

Massy, and antique, with your name inscribed,  
 And arms engraven.

VOLPONE                                      Good! and not a fox                                      95  
 Stretched on the earth, with fine delusive sleights,  
 Mocking a gaping crow? ha, Mosca?

MOSCA

Sharp, sir.

VOLPONE

Give me my furs. Why dost thou laugh so, man?

MOSCA

I cannot choose, sir, when I apprehend                                      100  
 What thoughts he has, without, now, as he walks:  
 That this might be the last gift he should give;  
 That this would fetch you; if you died today,  
 And gave him all, what he should be tomorrow;  
 What large return would come of all his ventures;  
 How he should worshipped be, and revered;                                      105  
 Ride, with his furs, and foot-cloths; waited on  
 By herds of fools, and clients; have clear way  
 Made for his moyle, as lettered as himself;  
 Be called the great, and learned advocate:  
 And then concludes, there's nought impossible.                                      110

VOLPONE

Yes, to be learned, Mosca.

MOSCA

O, no: rich

86 *furs* worn by the sick for warmth

90 *gor-crow* carrion crow

95-97 *fox . . . crow* for a similar application of the fable of the crow,  
 dropping its cheese as it sings for the adulatory fox, see Horace,  
*Satires* II. v, 55

104 *ventures* enterprising investments; compare I. i, 33

106 *foot-cloths* pageant drapery for a horse

Implies it. Hood an ass with reverend purple,  
 So you can hide his two ambitious ears,  
 And he shall pass for a cathedral doctor.

VOLPONE

115

My caps, my caps, good Mosca. Fetch him in.

MOSCA

Stay, sir, your ointment for your eyes.

VOLPONE

That's true;

Dispatch, dispatch: I long to have possession  
 Of my new present.

MOSCA

That, and thousands more,

I hope to see you lord of.

VOLPONE

Thanks, kind Mosca.

MOSCA

120

And that, when I am lost in blended dust,

And hundred such as I am, in succession—

VOLPONE

Nay, that were too much, Mosca.

MOSCA

You shall live,

Still, to delude these harpies.

VOLPONE

Loving Mosca!

[Looking into a glass]

112 *reverend purple* crimson robes of a Doctor of Divinity

115 *caps* probably ear-caps, prompted by line 113, at this point,  
 perhaps, Volpone gets into bed

116 *ointment* to make his eyes sticky and rheumy

112-114 *Hood . . . doctor* one of the recurrent jokes in Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* (see Fig. 1, p. vi). Folly tells how others try to hide their own foolishness: 'So that not so much as they can dissemble me, who take upon them most semblant of wysedome, and walke lyke Asses in Lyons skinnes. That although they counterfeite what they can, yet on some syde their long eares pearyng foorth, dooe discover them to come of Midas progenie. . . . So that some be of such a vaingloriousness, as whan they can least skylle thereof, yet will they fire, and nodde the head at it, and (as the Asse doeth) wagge theyr eares, to make others beleve that they are depely seen therein.' (Chaloner's translation, 1549 (1965), pp. 10-11). Erasmus's Latin may have suggested the pun on 'ambitious' that Chaloner's 'vaingloriousness' misses: 'Quod si qui paulo sunt ambiciosiores, arrideant tamen & applaudant, atque asini exemplo. . . .' (*Opera* 1703 (1962), IV, 409B). Holbein makes much of the joke, featuring the ass's ears in three further illustrations (*Opera* IV, 442C, 450B, 464B); in the last one the satire is specifically upon Doctors of Divinity.

'Tis well! My pillow now, and let him enter

[Exit MOSCA]

Now, my feigned cough, my phthisic, and my gout,  
My apoplexy, palsy, and catarrhs,  
Help, with your forced functions, this my posture,  
Wherein, this three year, I have milked their hopes.  
He comes, I hear him—uh! uh! uh! uh! O—

125

### Act I, Scene iii

[Enter MOSCA, with VOLTORE bearing plate. VOLPONE in bed]

MOSCA

You still are what you were, sir. Only you,  
Of all the rest, are he, commands his love:  
And you do wisely, to preserve it, thus,  
With early visitation, and kind notes  
Of your good meaning to him, which, I know,  
Cannot but come most grateful. Patron, sir!  
Here's Signior Voltore is come—

5

VOLPONE

What say you?

MOSCA

Sir, Signior Voltore is come, this morning,  
To visit you.

VOLPONE

I thank him.

125–127 *Now . . . posture* a sacrilegious invocation in the epic  
manner to the powers of feigned disease

125 *phthisic* consumption or asthma

127 *posture* pose, imposture

4 *notes* signs

5 *good meaning* well-wishing

6 *grateful* welcome

---

*Act I, Scene iii.* 'This and the following scenes are really a Roman *salutio* i.e. the morning visit of clients to their patron so often referred to and described by the satirists.' (Rea)

In Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead* 19 (9) Polystratus, who has at last died at ninety-eight, tells how his admirers flocked to his door at dawn, bearing him gifts from all corners of the earth: 'I would keep saying in public that I had left each of them my heir, and each would believe me, and show himself more assiduous than ever in his flattery.' (Loeb edition (1961), VII, p. 99). See also p. 158 below.

MOSCA

And hath brought

A piece of antique plate, bought of St. Mark,

With which he here presents you.

10

VOLPONE

He is welcome.

Pray him, to come more often.

MOSCA

Yes.

VOLTORE

What says he?

MOSCA

He thanks you, and desires you to see him often.

VOLPONE

Mosca!

MOSCA My patron?

VOLPONE

Bring him near, where is he?

I long to feel his hand.

MOSCA [*Guiding Volpone's hand*] The plate is here, sir.

15

VOLTORE

How fare you, sir?

VOLPONE

I thank you, Signior Voltore.

Where is the plate? Mine eyes are bad.

VOLTORE

[*Putting it into his hand*] I'm sorry

To see you still thus weak.

MOSCA [*Aside*]

That he is not weaker.

VOLPONE

You are too munificent.

VOLTORE

No, sir, would to heaven,

I could as well give health to you, as that plate.

20

VOLPONE

You give, sir, what you can. I thank you. Your love

Hath taste in this, and shall not be unanswered.

I pray you see me often.

VOLTORE

Yes, I shall, sir.

VOLPONE

Be not far from me.

MOSCA (*To Voltore*)

Do you observe that, sir?

VOLPONE

Hearken unto me, still: it will concern you.

25

MOSCA

You are a happy man, sir, know your good.

VOLPONE

I cannot now last long—

10 of *St. Mark* in *St. Mark's Square*, celebrated for its goldsmiths' shops

22 *Hath taste in* can be felt in





MOSCA

He ever liked your course, sir, that first took him.  
 I, oft, have heard him say, how he admired  
 Men of your large profession, that could speak  
 To every cause, and things mere contraries,  
 Till they were hoarse again, yet all be law; 55  
 That, with most quick agility, could turn,  
 And re-turn; make knots, and undo them;  
 Give forkèd counsel; take provoking gold  
 On either hand, and put it up: these men,  
 He knew, would thrive, with their humility. 60  
 And, for his part, he thought, he should be bless'd  
 To have his heir of such a suffering spirit,  
 So wise, so grave, of so perplexed a tongue,  
 And loud withall, that would not wag, nor scarce  
 Lie still, without a fee; when every word 65  
 Your worship but lets fall, is a chequeen!

*Another knocks*

Who's that? one knocks; I would not have you seen, sir.  
 And yet—pretend you came, and went in haste;  
 I'll fashion an excuse. And, gentle sir,  
 When you do come to swim, in golden lard, 70  
 Up to the arms, in honey, that your chin  
 Is born up stiff, with fatness of the flood,  
 Think on your vassal; but remember me:  
 I ha' not been your worst of clients.

VOLTORE

Mosca—

MOSCA

When will you have your inventory brought, sir? 75  
 Or see a copy of the will? [*Knocking again*] Anon!  
 I'll bring 'em to you, sir. Away, be gone  
 Put business in your face. [*Exit VOLTORE*]

VOLPONE

Excellent, Mosca!

Come hither, let me kiss thee.

51 *course* way of doing things51 *took* captivated51-55 Suggested by Horace, *Satires* II. v, 33-34, and Cornelius Agrippa, *De Incertitudine* ch. 9353 *large* liberal, expansive and eloquent58 *forkèd* equivocal58 *provoking gold* court fees (provoke, 'to call to a judge or court to take up one's cause' *OED*)59 *either hand* for either party59 *put it up* either 'deposit it' or (Mosca's real meaning) 'pocket it'63 *perplexed* involved, puzzling66 *chequeen* (F *cecchine*) Venetian gold coin, sequin

MOSCA Keep you still, sir.

Here is Corbaccio.

VOLPONE Set the plate away.

80

The vulture's gone, and the old raven's come.

### Act I, Scene iv

MOSCA

Betake you to your silence, and your sleep.

[Sets plate aside] Stand there, and multiply. Now we shall see

A wretch who is indeed more impotent

Than this can feign to be; yet hopes to hop

Over his grave. [Enter CORBACCIO] Signior Corbaccio!

5

You're very welcome, sir.

CORBACCIO

How does your patron?

MOSCA

Troth, as he did, sir, no amends.

CORBACCIO

What? mends he?

MOSCA

No, sir: he is rather worse.

CORBACCIO

That's well. Where is he?

MOSCA

Upon his couch, sir, newly fall'n asleep.

CORBACCIO

Does he sleep well?

MOSCA

No wink, sir, all this night,

10

Nor yesterday, but slumbers.

CORBACCIO

Good! He should take

Some counsel of physicians; I have brought him

An opiate here, from mine own doctor—

MOSCA

He will not hear of drugs.

CORBACCIO

Why? I myself

Stood by, while 't was made; saw all th' ingredients;

15

And know, it cannot but most gently work.

My life for his, 'tis but to make him sleep.

VOLPONE [Aside]

Ay, his last sleep, if he would take it.

MOSCA

Sir,

He has no faith in physic.

CORBACCIO

Say you, say you?

MOSCA

He has no faith in physic: he does think  
Most of your doctors are the greater danger,  
And worse disease t'escape. I often have  
Heard him protest, that your physician  
Should never be his heir.

20

CORBACCIO

Not I his heir?

MOSCA

Not your physician, sir.

CORBACCIO

O, no, no, no,

25

I do not mean it.

MOSCA

No, sir, nor their fees

He cannot brook: he says, they flay a man  
Before they kill him.

CORBACCIO

Right, I do conceive you.

MOSCA

And then, they do it by experiment;  
For which the law not only doth absolve 'em,  
But gives them great reward: and he is loath  
To hire his death, so.

30

CORBACCIO

It is true, they kill,

With as much licence, as a judge.

MOSCA

Nay, more;

For he but kills, sir, where the law condemns,  
And these can kill him, too.

CORBACCIO

Ay, or me:

35

Or any man. How does his apoplex?

Is that strong on him still?

MOSCA

Most violent.

His speech is broken, and his eyes are set,

His face drawn longer than 't was wont—

CORBACCIO

How? How?

Stronger than he was wont?

MOSCA

No, sir: his face

40

Drawn longer, than 't was wont.

CORBACCIO

O, good.

MOSCA

His mouth

21, 25 *your* i.e. doctors and physicians in general; the satire upon the medical profession owes much to Cornelius Agrippa, *De Vanitate* (see Introduction, p. xxi)

27 *flay* strip off skin

28 *conceive* understand

29 *experiment* trial, upon the patient

36 *apoplex* apoplexy; Hippocrates held the 'strong apoplex' incurable

Is ever gaping, and his eyelids hang.

CORBACCIO

Good.

MOSCA

A freezing numbness stiffens all his joints,  
And makes the colour of his flesh like lead.

CORBACCIO

'Tis good.

MOSCA

His pulse beats slow, and dull.

CORBACCIO

Good symptoms, still.

45

MOSCA

And, from his brain—

CORBACCIO

Ha? How? Not from his brain?

MOSCA

Yes, sir, and from his brain—

CORBACCIO

I conceive you, good.

MOSCA

Flows a cold sweat, with a continual rheum,  
Forth the resolvèd corners of his eyes.

CORBACCIO

Is't possible? Yet I am better, ha!

50

How does he, with the swimming of his head?

MOSCA

O, sir, 'tis past the *scotomy*; he, now,  
Hath lost his feeling, and hath left to snort;  
You hardly can perceive him, that he breathes.

CORBACCIO

Excellent, excellent, sure I shall outlast him:  
This makes me young again, a score of years.

55

MOSCA

I was a-coming for you, sir.

CORBACCIO

Has he made his will?

What has he given me?

MOSCA

No, sir.

CORBACCIO

Nothing? ha?

MOSCA

He has not made his will, sir.

CORBACCIO

Oh, oh, oh.

What then did Voltore, the lawyer, here?

60

46 *from his brain* drainage of brain fluid was believed the last stage of strong apoplexy, and Corbaccio eagerly recognises its significance

49 *resolvèd* slackened

52 *scotomy* 'dizziness accompanied by dimness of sight' (OED)

53 *left* ceased

60 *What then did F* (Q But what did)

MOSCA

He smelt a carcass, sir, when he but heard  
My master was about his testament;  
As I did urge him to it, for your good—

CORBACCIO

He came unto him, did he? I thought so.

MOSCA

Yes, and presented him this piece of plate.

65

CORBACCIO

To be his heir?

MOSCA

I do not know, sir.

CORBACCIO

True,

I know it too.

MOSCA

By your own scale, sir.

CORBACCIO

Well,

I shall prevent him, yet. See, Mosca, look,  
Here, I have brought a bag of bright chequeens,  
Will quite weigh down his plate.

MOSCA

Yea, marry, sir!

70

This is true physic, this your sacred medicine,  
No talk of *opiates*, to this great *elixir*.

CORBACCIO

'Tis *aurum palpabile*, if not *potabile*.

MOSCA

It shall be ministered to him in his bowl?

CORBACCIO

Ay, do, do, do.

MOSCA

Most blessed cordial!

75

This will recover him.

CORBACCIO

Yes, do, do, do.

MOSCA

I think, it were not best, sir.

CORBACCIO

What?

MOSCA

To recover him.

67 *By . . . scale* either 'by your own estimation, without my help' or 'judging by your own case'

68 *prevent* keep in front of

70 *weigh down* outweigh; perhaps suggested by Mosca's 'scale'

72 *elixir* alchemical essence fabled to make life eternal; analogous to the 'stone' thought to eternalise base metal into gold

73 *aurum . . . potabile* 'palpable, if not drinkable, gold'

73 *aurum potabile* was held a sovereign remedy for all diseases

75 *cordial* a medicine to invigorate the heart, e.g. potable gold

CORBACCIO

O, no, no, no; by no means.

MOSCA Why, sir, this

Will work some strange effect, if he but feel it.

CORBACCIO

'Tis true, therefore forbear, I'll take my venture:

80

Give me 't again.

MOSCA At no hand, pardon me;

You shall not do yourself that wrong, sir. I

Will so advise you, you shall have it all.

CORBACCIO

How?

MOSCA Ali, sir, 'tis your right, your own; no man

Can claim a part: 'tis yours, without a rival,

85

Decreed by destiny.

CORBACCIO

How? how, good Mosca?

MOSCA

I'll tell you, sir. This fit he shall recover—

CORBACCIO

I do conceive you.

MOSCA And, on first advantage

Of his gained sense, will I re-importune him

90

Unto the making of his testament;

And show him this.

CORBACCIO

Good, good.

MOSCA

'Tis better yet,

If you will hear, sir.

CORBACCIO

Yes, with all my heart.

MOSCA

Now, would I counsel you, make home with speed;

There, frame a will: whereto you shall inscribe

My master your sole heir.

CORBACCIO

And disinherit

95

My son?

MOSCA O, sir, the better: for that colour

Shall make it much more taking.

CORBACCIO

O, but colour?

80 *venture* i.e. the bag of gold

88 *advantage* opportunity

89 *gained* regained

94 *frame* devise

94 *whereto* to the end that

96 *colour* semblance

97 *taking* attractive

MOSCA

This will, sir, you shall send it unto me.

Now, when I come to enforce, as I will do,

Your cares, your watchings, and your many prayers, 100

Your more than many gifts, your this day's present,

And, last, produce your will; where, without thought,

Or least regard, unto your proper issue,

A son so brave, and highly meriting, 105

The stream of your diverted love hath thrown you

Upon my master, and made him your heir:

He cannot be so stupid, or stone dead,

But, out of conscience, and mere gratitude—

CORBACCIO

He must pronounce me, his?

MOSCA 'Tis true.

CORBACCIO This plot

Did I think on before.

MOSCA I do believe it. 110

CORBACCIO

Do you not believe it?

MOSCA Yes, sir.

CORBACCIO Mine own project.

MOSCA

Which when he hath done, sir—

CORBACCIO Published me his heir?

MOSCA

And you so certain to survive him—

CORBACCIO Ay.

MOSCA

Being so lusty a man—

CORBACCIO 'Tis true.

MOSCA Yes, sir.

CORBACCIO

I thought on that too. See, how he should be

The very organ, to express my thoughts! 115

MOSCA

You have not only done yourself a good—

CORBACCIO

But multiplied it on my son?

MOSCA 'Tis right, sir.

99 *enforce urge*

103 *proper issue* own true offspring

115 *See . . . be* 'See, if he isn't . . .'

116 *organ* medium, instrument



CORBACCIO

Still, my invention.

MOSCA

'Las, sir, heaven knows,

It hath been all my study, all my care,

120

(I e'en grow grey withal) how to work things—

CORBACCIO

I do conceive, sweet Mosca.

MOSCA

You are he,

For whom I labour, here.

CORBACCIO

Ay, do, do, do:

I'll straight about it.

[*Begins to go*]

MOSCA

[*Aside*] Rook go with you, raven.

CORBACCIO

I know thee honest.

MOSCA

You do lie, sir.

CORBACCIO

And—

125

MOSCA

Your knowledge is no better than your ears, sir.

CORBACCIO

I do not doubt, to be a father to thee.

MOSCA

Nor I, to gull my brother of his blessing.

CORBACCIO

I may ha' my youth restored to me, why not?

MOSCA

Your worship is a precious ass—

CORBACCIO

What say'st thou?

130

MOSCA

I do desire your worship, to make haste, sir.

CORBACCIO

'Tis done, 'tis done, I go.

[*Exit CORBACCIO*]VOLPONE [*Leaping up*]

O I shall burst;

Let out my sides, let out my sides—

MOSCA

Contain

Your flux of laughter, sir. You know this hope

Is such a bait, it covers any hook.

135

VOLPONE

O, but thy working, and thy placing it!

119 *Still, my invention* echoes 'Mine own project'119 'Las Alas                      124 *straight* immediately124 *Rook go with you* 'may you be rooked'126 *Your . . . ears* both a taunt and a strict truth128 *my brother* i.e. Corbaccio's son, with a glance at Jacob's cheating  
of Esau (*Genesis* 27)                      134 *flux* flow, morbid discharge

I cannot hold; good rascal, let me kiss thee:  
I never knew thee, in so rare a humour.

MOSCA

Alas, sir, I but do, as I am taught;  
Follow your grave instructions; give 'em words; 140  
Pour oil into their ears; and send them hence.

VOLPONE

'Tis true, 'tis true. What a rare punishment  
Is avarice, to itself!

MOSCA

Ay, with our help, sir.

VOLPONE

So many cares, so many maladies, 145  
So many fears attending on old age,  
Yea, death so often called on, as no wish  
Can be more frequent with 'em, their limbs faint,  
Their senses dull, their seeing, hearing, going,  
All dead before them; yea, their very teeth, 150  
Their instruments of eating, failing them:  
Yet this is reckoned life! Nay, here was one,  
Is now gone home, that wishes to live longer!  
Feels not his gout, nor palsy, feigns himself  
Younger by scores of years, flatters his age, 155  
With confident belying it, hopes he may  
With charms, like Aeson, have his youth restored:  
And with these thoughts so battens, as if fate  
Would be as easily cheated on, as he,  
And all turns air! *Another knocks* Who's that, there, now?  
a third?

MOSCA

Close, to your couch again; I hear his voice. 160  
It is Corvino, our spruce merchant.

VOLPONE [*Lying down*]

Dead.

MOSCA

Another bout, sir, with your eyes. Who's there?

138 *rare a humour* fine and inventive mood

140 *give 'em words* deceive (proverbial)

141 *Pour . . . ears* deceive with fulsome words (proverbial)

144-151 *So many . . . life* derived largely from Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 7  
167-168 (see Introduction p. xx); compare *Measure for Measure*  
III. i, 5-40

148 *going* ability to walk

156 *Aeson* Jason's father, whose youth was restored by Medea's magic

157 *battens* grows fat

162 *Another bout* Mosca applies more ointment

## Act I, Scene v

[Enter CORVINO]

MOSCA

Signior Corvino! come most wished for! O,  
How happy were you, if you knew it, now!

CORVINO

Why? what? wherein?

MOSCA

The tardy hour is come, sir.

CORVINO

He is not dead?

MOSCA

Not dead, sir, but as good;

He knows no man.

CORVINO

How shall I do, then?

MOSCA

Why, sir?

5

CORVINO

I have brought him, here, a pearl.

MOSCA

Perhaps he has

So much remembrance left, as to know you, sir;

He still calls on you, nothing but your name

Is in his mouth; is your pearl orient, sir?

CORVINO

Venice was never owner of the like.

10

VOLPONE [*Faintly*]

Signior Corvino.

MOSCA

Hark.

VOLPONE

Signior Corvino.

MOSCA

He calls you, step and give it him. He's here, sir.

And he has brought you a rich pearl.

CORVINO

How do you, sir?

Tell him it doubles the twelfth carat.

MOSCA

Sir,

He cannot understand, his hearing's gone;

15

And yet it comforts him, to see you—

CORVINO

Say,

I have a diamant for him, too.

MOSCA

Best show't, sir,

Put it into his hand; 'tis only there

9 *orient* eastern pearls were of superior value and brilliancy

14 *carat* measure of weight of precious stones (then  $3\frac{1}{4}$  grains)

17 *diamant* Jonson anachronistically preferred this Middle English form

He apprehends: he has his feeling, yet.

[VOLPONE *seizes the pearl*]

See, how he grasps it!

CORVINO 'Las, good gentleman!

20

How pitiful the sight is!

MOSCA Tut, forget, sir.

The weeping of an heir should still be laughter,  
Under a visor.

CORVINO Why? am I his heir?

MOSCA

Sir, I am sworn, I may not show the will,  
Till he be dead: but, here has been Corbaccio,  
Here has been Voltore, here were others too,  
I cannot number 'em, they were so many,

25

All gaping here for legacies, but I,  
Taking the vantage of his naming you,  
'Signior Corvino, Signior Corvino', took  
Paper, and pen, and ink, and there I asked him,  
Whom he would have his heir? 'Corvino'. Who  
Should be executor? 'Corvino'. And

30

To any question he was silent to,  
I still interpreted the nods he made,  
Through weakness, for consent; and sent home th'others,  
Nothing bequeathed them, but to cry, and curse.

35

*They embrace*

CORVINO

O, my dear Mosca. Does he not perceive us?

MOSCA

No more than a blind harper. He knows no man,  
No face of friend, nor name of any servant,  
Who 'twas that fed him last, or gave him drink:  
Not those, he hath begotten, or brought up  
Can he remember.

40

CORVINO Has he children?

MOSCA

Bastards,

Some dozen, or more, that he begot on beggars,  
Gipsies, and Jews, and black-moors, when he was drunk.  
Knew you not that, sir? 'Tis the common fable,

45

22-23 *The weeping* . . . *visor* echoing Horace, *Satires* II. v, 103

23 *visor* a mask

30 *Signior Corvino* Mosca mimics Volpone's feeble cry

39 *blind harper* proverbial term for anonymous figure in a crowd

46 *fable* story, report (not 'fiction')

The Dwarf, the Fool, the Eunuch are all his;  
 He's the true father of his family,  
 In all, save me: but he has given 'em nothing.

CORVINO

That's well, that's well. Art sure he does not hear us? 50

MOSCA

Sure, sir? Why, look you, credit your own sense.

[*Shouts in VOLPONE'S ear*]

The pox approach, and add to your diseases,  
 If it would send you hence the sooner, sir,  
 For, your incontinence, it hath deserved it  
 Thoroughly and thoroughly, and the plague to boot. 55  
 [*To CORVINO*] You may come near, sir.

Would you once close

Those filthy eyes of yours, that flow with slime,  
 Like two frog-pits; and those same hanging cheeks,  
 Covered with hide instead of skin—Nay, help, sir—  
 That look like frozen dish-clouts, set on end. 60

CORVINO

Or, like an old smoked wall, on which the rain  
 Ran down in streaks.

MOSCA

Excellent, sir, speak out;

You may be louder yet; a culverin  
 Dischargèd in his ear, would hardly bore it.

CORVINO

His nose is like a common sewer, still running. 65

MOSCA

'Tis good! And what his mouth?

CORVINO

A very draught.

MOSCA

O, stop it up— [*Starts to smother him*]

CORVINO

By no means.

MOSCA

Pray you, let me.

Faith, I could stifle him, rarely, with a pillow;  
 As well as any woman that should keep him.

48 *family* household

52 *pox* the great pox, syphilis

54 *it . . . it* 'your incontinence hath deserved the pox'

63 *culverin* hand-gun

66 *draught* sink, cesspool

68 *rarely* excellently

69 *keep* keep house for, look after

CORVINO

Do as you will, but I'll be gone.

MOSCA

Be so;

70

It is your presence makes him last so long.

CORVINO

I pray you, use no violence.

MOSCA

No, sir? why?

Why should you be thus scrupulous, pray you, sir?

CORVINO

Nay, at your discretion.

MOSCA

Well, good sir, be gone.

CORVINO

I will not trouble him now, to take my pearl?

75

MOSCA

Puh! nor your diamant. What a needless care

Is this afflicts you! [*Takes the jewels*] Is not all, here, yours?

Am not I here? whom you have made? your creature?

That owe my being to you?

CORVINO

Grateful Mosca!

Thou art my friend, my fellow, my companion,

80

My partner, and shalt share in all my fortunes.

MOSCA

Excepting one.

CORVINO

What's that?

MOSCA

Your gallant wife, sir.

[*Exit CORVINO*]

Now, is he gone; we had no other means

To shoot him hence, but this.

VOLPONE

My divine Mosca!

Thou hast today outgone thyself. *Another knocks*

Who's there?

85

I will be troubled with no more. Prepare

Me music, dances, banquets, all delights;

The Turk is not more sensual in his pleasures

Than will Volpone. [*Exit MOSCA*] Let me see, a pearl!

A diamant! plate! chequeens! Good morning's purchase;

90

Why, this is better than rob churches, yet;

Or fat, by eating, once a month, a man. [*Enter MOSCA*]

Who is't?

MOSCA

The beauteous Lady Would-be, sir,

75 *pearl* this, with the diamond, is still in Volpone's fist82 *gallant* fine, beautiful90 *purchase* haul (thieves' cant)

Wife, to the English knight, Sir Politic Would-be,  
 (This is the style, sir, is directed me) 95  
 Hath sent to know, how you have slept tonight,  
 And if you would be visited.

VOLPONE Not now.

Some three hours hence—

MOSCA I told the squire so much.

VOLPONE

When I am high with mirth, and wine: then, then.  
 'Fore heaven, I wonder at the desperate valour 100  
 Of the bold English, that they dare let loose  
 Their wives, to all encounters!

MOSCA Sir, this knight

Had not his name for nothing, he is politic,  
 And knows, how e'er his wife affect strange airs,  
 She hath not yet the face, to be dishonest. 105  
 But, had she Signior Corvino's wife's face—

VOLPONE

Has she so rare a face?

MOSCA O, sir, the wonder,

The blazing star of Italy! a wench  
 O' the first year, a beauty, ripe, as harvest!  
 Whose skin is whiter than a swan, all over! 110  
 Than silver, snow, or lillies! a soft lip,  
 Would tempt you to eternity of kissing!  
 And flesh that melteth, in the touch, to blood!  
 Bright as your gold! and lovely as your gold!

VOLPONE

Why had I not known this before?

MOSCA Alas, sir, 115

Myself, but yesterday, discovered it.

VOLPONE

How might I see her?

MOSCA O, not possible;

She's kept as warily as is your gold;

Never does come abroad, never takes air

100 *desperate valour* the English were much wondered at in Italy for  
 the freedom they allowed their wives; the Italians were reputed to  
 incarcerate them (see below, pp. 162-3)

105 *dishonest* unchaste

109 *O' the first year* perhaps 'without blemish'; see *Leviticus* IX. iii,  
 XII. vi etc., referring to the sacrificial kid or lamb; but perhaps  
 'young and tender'

119 *abroad* out of the house

But at a window. All her looks are sweet,  
As the first grapes, or cherries, and are watched  
As near as they are.

120

VOLPONE I must see her—

MOSCA

Sir,

There is a guard, of ten spies thick, upon her;  
All his whole household: each of which is set  
Upon his fellow, and have all their charge,  
When he goes out, when he comes in, examined.

125

VOLPONE

I will go see her, though but at her window.

MOSCA

In some disguise, then.

VOLPONE

That is true. I must

Maintain mine own shape, still, the same; we'll think.

[*Exeunt* VOLPONE, MOSCA]

## Act II, Scene i

[*The Square, before CORVINO's House*]

[*Enter*] POLITIC WOULD-BE, PEREGRINE

SIR POLITIC

Sir, to a wise man, all the world's his soil.  
It is not Italy, nor France, nor Europe,  
That must bound me, if my fates call me forth.  
Yet, I protest, it is no salt desire  
Of seeing countries, shifting a religion,  
Nor any disaffection to the state  
Where I was bred (and unto which I owe  
My dearest plots) hath brought me out; much less  
That idle, antique, stale, grey-headed project  
Of knowing men's minds, and manners, with Ulysses;  
But a peculiar humour of my wife's,

5

10

120 *window* ed. (FQ *windore*); Jonson's spelling was based on the false  
derivation 'wind-door'; the s.d. at II. ii, 222 has *windo* in F,  
suggesting that the pronunciation was as now

122 *near* closely

125-126 *charge* . . . *examined* i.e. each is questioned about the  
servant under his charge

129 *mine own shape* i.e. his own apparent shape

4 *salt* wanton (used of bitches on heat)

8 *plots* projects

10 *knowing* . . . *Ulysses* alluding to the first lines of the *Odyssey*

11 *humour* whim, obsession



Laid for this height of Venice, to observe,  
To quote, to learn the language, and so forth—  
I hope you travel, sir, with licence?

PEREGRINE Yes.

SIR POLITIC

I dare the safelier converse—How long, sir, 15  
Since you left England?

PEREGRINE Seven weeks.

SIR POLITIC So lately!

You ha' not been with my lord ambassador?

PEREGRINE

Not yet, sir.

SIR POLITIC Pray you, what news, sir, vents our climate?

I heard, last night, a most strange thing reported 20  
By some of my lord's followers, and I long  
To hear, how 'twill be seconded.

PEREGRINE What was't, sir?

SIR POLITIC

Marry, sir, of a raven, that should build  
In a ship royal of the King's.

PEREGRINE [Aside]—This fellow

Does he gull me, trow? or is gulled?—Your name, sir?

SIR POLITIC

My name is Politic Would-be.

PEREGRINE [Aside]—O, that speaks him— 25

A knight, sir?

SIR POLITIC A poor knight, sir.

PEREGRINE Your lady

Lies here, in Venice, for intelligence  
Of tires, and fashions, and behaviour  
Among the courtesans? The fine Lady Would-be?

12 *Laid for this height* setting course for this latitude

13 *quote* make notes

14 *licence* warrant from the Lords of Council

17 *my lord ambassador* Sir Henry Wotton was ambassador to Venice from 1604 to 1612; Sir Politic has been thought to caricature him (see Introduction p. xix)

18 *vents* 'comes out of' or 'publishes'; the rhetoric strains either usage

22 *should* 'it is said', from an Old English usage

24 *gull* take in, fool (see Prologue 23n.)

25 *speaks him* expresses what he is

27 *Lies* stays

28 *tires* attires, head-dresses

SIR POLITIC

Yes, sir, the spider, and the bee, oft-times,  
Suck from one flower.

30

PEREGRINE

Good Sir Politic!

I cry your mercy; I have heard much of you:

'Tis true, sir, of your raven.

SIR POLITIC

On your knowledge?

PEREGRINE

Yes, and your lions whelping, in the Tower.

SIR POLITIC

Another whelp!

PEREGRINE

Another, sir.

SIR POLITIC

Now, heaven!

35

What prodigies be these? The fires at Berwick!

And the new star! These things concurring, strange!

And full of omen! Saw you those meteors?

PEREGRINE

I did, sir.

SIR POLITIC Fearful! Pray you sir, confirm me,

Were there three porcupises seen, above the bridge,

As they give out?

40

PEREGRINE

Six, and a sturgeon, sir.

SIR POLITIC

I am astonished!

PEREGRINE

Nay, sir, be not so;

I'll tell you a greater prodigy, than these—

SIR POLITIC

What should these things portend!

32 *I cry your mercy* I beg your pardon

33 *On your knowledge* 'your' may be impersonal, 'This is known to be true?'

35 *Another whelp!* Stow's *Annals* reports the whelping of King James's lions in the Tower on 5 August 1604 and 26 February 1605

36 *fires at Berwick* ghostly battles on Halidon Hill near Berwick caused border alarms in 1604; aurora borealis has been suggested as contributory to this and other marvels of the time

37 *the new star* Kepler discovered a nova in constellation Serpens in 1604; it was brighter than Jupiter and disappeared after two years

38 *meteors* taken as ill omens, because an apparent disturbance of the cosmos

40 *porcupises* Jonson's spelling is retained with its correct etymology; Stow tells of 'a great Porpus' taken from the Thames, and of 'a very great whale' up river a few days later (*Annals* 19 Jan. 1605/6); for the dating of the play see Introduction p. xxvii



PEREGRINE

And yet you knew him, it seems?

SIR POLITIC

I did so. Sir,

I knew him one of the most dangerous heads  
 Living within the state, and so I held him.

65

PEREGRINE

Indeed, sir?

SIR POLITIC While he lived, in action.

He has received weekly intelligence,  
 Upon my knowledge, out of the Low Countries,  
 For all parts of the world, in cabbages;  
 And those dispensed, again, t'ambassadors,  
 In oranges, musk-melons, apricots,  
 Lemons, pome-citrons, and such-like: sometimes  
 In Colchester oysters, and your Selsey cockles.

70

PEREGRINE

You make me wonder!

SIR POLITIC

Sir, upon my knowledge.

75

Nay, I have observed him, at your public ordinary,  
 Take his advertisement, from a traveller  
 (A concealed statesman) in a trencher of meat;  
 And, instantly, before the meal was done,  
 Convey an answer in a toothpick.

80

PEREGRINE

Strange!

How could this be, sir?

SIR POLITIC

Why, the meat was cut

So like his character, and so laid, as he  
 Must easily read the cipher.

PEREGRINE

I have heard,

He could not read, sir.

SIR POLITIC

So 'twas given out,

In polity, by those that did employ him:

85

64 *you knew him* F (Q you know him); the Q reading would make Sir  
 Politic's retort portentously pedantic and may therefore be pre-  
 ferred

70 *cabbages* regularly imported from Holland at this time

72 *musk-melons* common melons

73 *pome-citrons* citrons, or limes

74 *Colchester oysters . . . Selsey cockles* both delicacies in court  
 circles

76 *ordinary* tavern offering fixed prices

77 *advertisement* instruction or information

78 *concealed statesman* disguised agent of state

82 *character* cipher, code; cutting food into intricate shapes was  
 fashionable, see *Cymbeline* IV. ii, 49

But he could read, and had your languages,  
And to't, as sound a noddle—

PEREGRINE I have heard, sir,  
That your baboons were spies; and that they were  
A kind of subtle nation, near to China.

SIR POLITIC

Ay, ay, your *Mamuluchi*. Faith, they had 90  
Their hand in a French plot, or two; but they  
Were so extremely given to women, as  
They made discovery of all: yet I  
Had my advices here, on Wednesday last,  
From one of their own coat, they were returned, 95  
Made their relations, as the fashion is,  
And now stand fair, for fresh employment.

PEREGRINE [Aside]—'Heart!  
This Sir Pol will be ignorant of nothing—  
It seems, sir, you know all?

SIR POLITIC

Not all, sir. But, 100  
I have some general notions; I do love  
To note, and to observe: though I live out,  
Free from the active torrent, yet I'd mark  
The currents, and the passages of things,  
For mine own private use; and know the ebbs,  
And flows of state.

PEREGRINE

Believe it, sir, I hold 105  
Myself, in no small tie, unto my fortunes  
For casting me thus luckily, upon you;  
Whose knowledge, if your bounty equal it,  
May do me great assistance, in instruction  
For my behaviour, and my bearing, which 110  
Is yet so rude, and raw.

SIR POLITIC

Why? came you forth  
Empty of rules for travel?

87 *noddle* the back of the head and seat of the mind; perhaps less  
playful here than in its common use

90 *Mamuluchi* a macaronic version of *mamalik*, Circassian slaves  
who came to rule Egypt in the thirteenth century; nothing to do  
with baboons or China

93 *discovery* disclosure

94 *advices* news, dispatches

95 *coat* side

96 *relations* reports

97 *stand fair* are well set

97 *'Heart* i.e. God's Heart!

106 *tie* obligation

Faith, I had

SIR POLITIC

115

To be a gentleman, of ingenuous race—

To be, where I have been consulted with,

120

EREGRINE [*Seeing people approach*] Who be these, sir?

[illegible]

Act II, Scene ii

[Enter MOSCA and NANO, disguised, with materials for a scaffold stage. A crowd follows.]

**MOSCA**

Under that window, there't must be. The same.

SIR POLITIC

Fellows, to mount a bank! Did your instructor

In the dear tongues, never discourse to you

Of the Italian mountebanks?

PEREGRINE

Yes, sir.

SIR POLITIC

Why,

Here shall you see one.

## PEREGRINE

They are quacksalvers,

Fellows, that live by venting oils and drugs?

SIR POLITIC

Was that the character he gave you of them?

113 *vulgar grammar* ordinary grammar book, apt to contain phrases and precepts; Florio's grammar may be intended

114 *cried* called out, intoned

117 bark shell, outward appearance; may include pun suggested by 'cried'

118 *ingenuous* noble; Sir Politic pauses to weigh Peregrine's potential

121 *high kind* important capacity

s.d. *scaffold stage* see Introduction pp. xxviii–xxix

2 *mount a bank* from Italian *monta in banco*; *bank* bench; see p. 164

3 *dear* esteemed

5 *quacksalvers* a Dutch word for quackers about ointment; hence modern 'quack'

6 *venting vending*

PEREGRINE

As I remember.

SIR POLITIC

Pity his ignorance.

They are the only knowing men of Europe!

Great general scholars, excellent physicians, 10

Most admired statesmen, professed favourites,

And cabinet counsellors, to the greatest princes!

The only languaged men, of all the world!

PEREGRINE

And, I have heard, they are most lewd impostors;

Made all of terms, and shreds; no less beliers 15

Of great men's favours, than their own vile medicines;

Which they will utter, upon monstrous oaths:

Selling that drug, for twopence, ere they part,

Which they have valued at twelve crowns, before.

SIR POLITIC

Sir, calumnies are answered best with silence: 20

Yourself shall judge. Who is it mounts, my friends?

MOSCA

Scoto of Mantua, sir.

SIR POLITIC

Is't he? Nay, then

I'll proudly promise, sir, you shall behold

Another man, than has been phant'sied to you.

I wonder, yet, that he should mount his bank 25

Here, in this nook, that has been wont t'appear

In face of the Piazza! Here, he comes.

[Enter VOLPONE, as a mountebank; with a crowd]

14 lewd ignorant 15 terms, and shreds jargon, snatches and tags

15 beliers misreporters 17 utter sell (compare Epistle, 69 and note)

22 Scoto of Mantua renowned Italian juggler who visited Elizabeth's court in 1576

27 In face of facing on to

---

27 Enter VOLPONE. A. B. Kernan finds a number of parallels between Volpone's Scoto and Jonson's professional situation. Both are playing before a popular audience after being used to a fashionable one (for all Jonson's plays were at Blackfriars before *Sejanus* and *Volpone* appeared at the Globe); Jonson was imprisoned because *Eastward Ho* offended King James, while Scoto is rumoured to have suffered the galleys for offending Cardinal Bembo; both aspire to learning and share a contempt for public taste; and it may be that the sixpence charged for the elixir was the cost of the more expensive seats at the first performance of *Volpone*. It is quite probable that Jonson glances archly and sardonically at his own art as public entertainer, but this is not (of course) the main effect of the scene.

VOLPONE [*to NANO*]

Mount, zany.

CROWD Follow, follow, follow, follow, follow.

SIR POLITIC

See how the people follow him! He's a man

May write ten thousand crowns, in bank, here. Note,

Mark but his gesture: I do use to observe

The state he keeps, in getting up! [VOLPONE *mounts stage*]

PEREGRINE

'Tis worth it, sir.

VOLPONE

Most noble gentlemen, and my worthy patrons, it may seem strange, that I, your Scoto Mantuano, who was ever wont to fix my bank in face of the public Piazza, near the shelter of the Portico to the Procuratia, should, now, after eight months' absence, from this illustrious city of Venice humbly retire myself, into an obscure nook of the Piazza.

SIR POLITIC

Did not I, now, object the same?

PEREGRINE

Peace, sir.

VOLPONE

Let me tell you: I am not, as your Lombard proverb saith, cold on my feet, or content to part with my commodities at a cheaper rate, than I accustomed: look not for it. Nor, that the calumnious reports of that impudent detractor, and shame to our profession—Alessandro Buttone, I mean—who gave out, in public, I was condemned a *sforzato* to the galleys, for poisoning the Cardinal Bembo's—cook, hath at all attached, much less dejected me. No, no, worthy gentlemen, to tell you true, I cannot endure, to see the rabble of these ground *ciarlitani*, that spread their cloaks on the pavement, as if they meant to do feats of activity, and

28 *zany* clown and servant, comic assistant

36 *Portico to the Procuratia* the arched residence of the Procurators on the north side of St. Mark's

39 *object* possibly in archaic sense 'put before the mind'

41 *cold on my feet* Italian, *aver freddo a 'piedi*, i.e. to be forced by poverty to sell cheaply

44 *Buttone* the name of this rival owes nothing to fact

45 *sforzato* '*Sfortzati*, galle-slaves, prisoners perforce' (Florio 1598)

46 *Bembo's—cook* the pause insinuates 'mistress'; Pietro Bembo (1470–1547), the great humanist, was born in Venice

47 *attached* arrested, constrained

49 *ground ciarlitani* charlatans working on the ground, without a bank



then come in, lamely, with their mouldy tales out of Boccaccio, like stale Tabarine, the fabulist: some of them discoursing their travels, and of their tedious captivity in the Turk's galleys, when indeed, were the truth known, they were the Christian's galleys, where very temperately, they ate bread, and drunk water, as a wholesome penance, enjoined them by their confessors, for base pilferies. 55

SIR POLITIC

Note but his bearing, and contempt of these.

VOLPONE

These turdy-facy-nasty-paty-lousy-fartical rogues, with one poor groat's-worth of unprepared antimony, finely wrapped up in several *scartoccios*, are able, very well, to kill their twenty a week, and play; yet, these meagre starved spirits, who have half stopped the organs of their minds with earthy oppilations, want not their favourers among your shrivelled, salad-eating artisans: who are overjoyed, that they may have their half-pe'rth of physic, though it purge 'em into another world, 't makes no matter. 60 65

SIR POLITIC

Excellent! Ha' you heard better language, sir?

VOLPONE

Well, let 'em go. And gentlemen, honourable gentlemen, know, that for this time, our bank, being thus removed from the clamours of the *canaglia*, shall be the scene of pleasure, and delight; for, I have nothing to sell, little, or nothing to sell. 70

SIR POLITIC

I told you, sir, his end.

PEREGRINE

You did so, sir.

VOLPONE

I protest, I, and my six servants, are not able to make of this 75

52 *Tarbarine* a famous zany in a touring Italian troop of the 1570s

56 *ate* (FQ *eate*)

59 *turdy* . . . *fartical* an Aristophanic phrase, compounded of abusive improvisations

61 *several* separate

61 *scartoccios* 'a coffin of paper for spice' (Florio 1598)

64 *earthly oppilations* gross obstructions, i.e. mundane concerns

65 *salad* probably meaning 'raw vegetables'

66 *half-pe'rth* ha'p'orth

71 *canaglia* 'raskallie people onelie fit for dogs companie' (Florio 1598)

precious liquor, so fast, as it is fetched away from my lodgings by gentlemen of your city; strangers of the Terra Firma; worshipful merchants; ay, and senators too: who, ever since my arrival, have detained me to their uses, by their splendid liberalities. And worthily. For, what avails your rich man to have his magazines stuffed with *moscadelli*, or of the purest grape, when his physicians prescribe him, on pain of death, to drink nothing but water, cocted with aniseeds? O, health! health! the blessing of the rich! the riches of the poor! who can buy thee at too dear a rate, since there is no enjoying this world without thee? Be not then so sparing of your purses, honourable gentlemen, as to abridge the natural course of life—

PEREGRINE

You see his end?

SIR POLITIC

Ay, is't not good?

VOLPONE

For, when a humid flux, or catarrh, by the mutability of air, falls from your head, into an arm, or shoulder, or any other part; take you a ducat, or your chequeen of gold, and apply to the place affected: see, what good effect it can work. No, no, 'tis this blessed *unguento*, this rare extraction, that hath only power to disperse all malignant humours, that proceed, either of hot, cold, moist, or windy causes—

PEREGRINE

I would he had put in dry too.

SIR POLITIC

Pray you, observe.

77-78 *Terra Firma* name for the mainland part of Venice80 *splendidous* common variant of 'splendid'81 *magazines* storehouses81 *moscadelli* 'the wine Muscadine' (Florio 1598), muscatel83 *cocted* boiled 94 *unguento* ointment

95 *malignant humours*. According to classical and medieval medical theory the four cardinal humours of the body were blood, phlegm, choler and melancholy, and they corresponded with the four elements—air (hot and moist), water (cold and moist), fire (hot and dry) and earth (cold and dry). Both pathological and temperamental traits were attributed to the dominance of one humour over the others, or to 'fluxes'—flowings of humours from one part of the body to another. In his early 'Humour' plays Jonson made some use of the psychological or character-forming aspect of the theory, but in *Volpone* it is confined to pathology; the notion that a man can fall under the dominion of a single passion or obsession, however, remains crucial, for upon it depends one's sense of the reality of Jonson's figures.

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## VOLPONE

To fortify the most indigest, and crude stomach, ay, were it  
 of one that, through extreme weakness, vomited blood,  
 applying only a warm napkin to the place, after the unction, 100  
 and fricace; for the *vertigine*, in the head, putting but a drop  
 into your nostrils, likewise, behind the ears; a most sover-  
 eign, and approved remedy: the *mal caduco*, cramps, con-  
 vulsions, paralyses, epilepsies, *tremor-cordia*, retired nerves, ill  
 vapours of the spleen, stoppings of the liver, the stone, the 105  
 strangury; *hernia ventosa*, *iliaca passio*; stops a *disenteria*  
 immediately; easeth the tortion of the small guts; and cures  
*melancholia hypocondriaca*, being taken and applied,  
 according to my printed receipt. (*Pointing to his bill and his*  
*glass*) For, this is the physician, this the medicine; this 110  
 counsels, this cures; this gives the direction, this works the  
 effect: and, in sum, both together may be termed an  
 abstract of the theoric, and practic in the Aesculapian art.  
 'Twill cost you eight crowns. And, Zan Fritada, pray thee  
 sing a verse, extempore, in honour of it. 115

## SIR POLITIC

How do you like him, sir?

## PEREGRINE

Most strangely, I!

## SIR POLITIC

Is not his language rare?

## PEREGRINE

But alchemy,

I never heard the like: or Broughton's books.

- 98 *crude* sour                      101 *fricace* massage  
 101 *vertigine* dizziness  
 103 *mal caduco* falling sickness (epilepsy)  
 104 *tremor-cordia* heart palpitations  
 104 *retired nerves* shrunk sinews  
 106 *strangury* painful urination  
 106 *hernia ventosa* gaseous protrusion (possibly strangulated hernia)  
 106 *iliaca passio* 'pain and wringing of the small guts (Holland's  
*Pliny* II. 39)  
 108 *melancholia hypocondriaca* melancholy was supposed to be  
 seated in the hypocondria—the soft parts of the body below the  
 rib cartilages                      109 *receipt* recipe  
 113 *Aesculapian* after Aesculapius, Greek and Roman god of medicine  
 114 *Zan Fritada* Volpone calls Nano by the name of a celebrated  
 zany (*fritata* = pancake)                      117 *But* 'except for' or 'pure'  
 118 *Broughton* Hugh Broughton (1549–1612), rabbinical scholar and  
 Puritan; compare *The Alchemist* II. iii, 237 where Doll's madness  
 (IV. v, 1–32) is blamed on Broughton

[NANO sings]

*Song*

Had old Hippocrates, or Galen, 120  
 That to their books put medicines all in,  
 But known this secret, they had never  
 (Of which they will be guilty ever)  
 Been murderers of so much paper,  
 Or wasted many a hurtless taper: 125  
 No Indian drug had ere been famèd,  
 Tobacco, sassafras not namèd,  
 Ne yet of guacum one small stick, sir,  
 Nor Raymond Lully's great elixir.  
 Ne had been known the Danish Gonswart, 130  
 Or Paracelsus, with his long sword.

PEREGRINE

All this, yet, will not do; eight crowns is high.

VOLPONE

No more; gentlemen, if I had but time to discourse to you  
 the miraculous effects of this my oil, surnamed *oglio del*  
*Scoto*; with the countless catalogue of those I have cured of 135  
 th'aforesaid, and many more diseases; the patents and  
 privileges of all the princes and commonwealths of  
 Christendom; or but the depositions of those that appeared  
 on my part, before the signiory of the *Sanita*, and most  
 learned college of physicians; where I was authorized, upon 140  
 notice taken of the admirable virtues of my medicaments,

120 *Hippocrates, or Galen* Hippocrates (born c. 460 bc) invented the  
 theory of humours and Galen (born c. ad 130) expounded it;  
 their authority in all medical matters was still recognised in  
 Jonson's time

125 *hurtless* harmless

127 *Tobacco, sassafras* both used medicinally and newly introduced  
 from America

128 *guacum* drug extracted from resin of guaiacum tree

129 *Raymond Lully* (1235-1315) sage, evangelist, and astrologer from  
 Majorca; apocryphal alchemical works were ascribed to him  
 posthumously, hence the tradition that he discovered the elixir of  
 life; see *The Alchemist* II. v, 8

130 *Danish Gonswart* unidentified; suggestions include a Dutch  
 theologian (Wessel Gansfort) and a Danish Chemist (Berthold  
 Schwarz)

131 *Paracelsus* . . . *sword* Paracelsus was supposed to have kept his  
 quintessences in the pommel of his sword

139 *signiory of the Sanita* the 'health masters' of Venice who licensed  
 physicians, drug-vendors and mountebanks



I am content to be deprived of it for six; six crowns is the price; and less in courtesy, I know you cannot offer me: take it, or leave it, howsoever, both it, and I, am at your service. I ask you not, as the value of the thing, for then I should demand of you a thousand crowns, so the Cardinals Montalto, Fernese, the great Duke of Tuscany, my gossip, with divers other princes have given me; but I despise money: only to show my affection to you, honourable gentlemen, and your illustrious state here, I have neglected the messages of these princes, mine own offices, framed my journey hither, only to present you with the fruits of my travels. [*To NANO and MOSCA*] Tune your voices once more to the touch of your instruments, and give the honourable assembly some delightful recreation.

PEREGRINE

What monstrous, and most painful circumstance  
Is here, to get some three or four *gazets*!  
Some threepence, i' th' whole, for that 'twill come to.

*Song*

You that would last long, list to my song,  
Make no more coil, but buy of this oil.  
Would you be ever fair? and young?  
Stout of teeth? and strong of tongue?  
Tart of palate? quick of ear?  
Sharp of sight? of nostril clear?  
Moist of hand? and light of foot?  
Or, I will come nearer to it,  
Would you live free from all diseases?  
Do the act, your mistress pleases;

179-180 *Cardinals Montalto*, *Fernese* Montalto became Pope Sixtus V in 1585; *Fernese* probably an allusion to the notorious Alessandro Farnese who became Pope Paul III in 1534 but there was also a later Cardinal Alessandro Farnese (1520-1589)

180 *Duke of Tuscany* office held by Cosimo de' Medici after 1569

180 *gossip* godsib, godfather; also 'familiar acquaintance'

184 *offices* duties

189 *What monstrous* . . . Peregrine's speech is probably aside to the audience

190 *gazets* Venetian pennies, as Peregrine's explanation indicates

194 *coil* pother, fuss

197 *Tart* sharp, keen

199 *Moist of hand* the sign of 'pith and livelihood' in *Venus & Adonis* 25-26



Yet fright all aches from your bones?  
Here's a medicine, for the nones.

VOLPONE

Well, I am in a humour, at this time, to make a present of 205  
the small quantity my coffer contains: to the rich, in  
courtesy, and to the poor, for God's sake. Wherefore, now  
mark; I asked you six crowns; and six crowns, at other  
times, you have paid me; you shall not give me six crowns,  
nor five, nor four, nor three, nor two, nor one; nor half a 210  
ducat; no, nor a *moccenigo*: six—pence it will cost you, or six  
hundred pound—expect no lower price, for by the banner  
of my front, I will not bate a *bagatine*, that I will have, only,  
a pledge of your loves, to carry something from amongst you,  
to show, I am not contemned by you. Therefore, now, toss 215  
your handkerchiefs, cheerfully, cheerfully; and be  
advertised, that the first heroic spirit, that deigns to grace  
me, with a handkerchief, I will give it a little remembrance of  
something, beside, shall please it better, than if I had  
presented it with a double pistolet. 220

PEREGRINE

Will you be that heroic spark, Sir Pol?  
O, see! the window has prevented you.

CELIA *at the window throws down her handkerchief*

VOLPONE

Lady, I kiss your bounty: and for this timely grace, you  
have done your poor Scoto of Mantua, I will return you,

203 *aches . . . bones* probably alluding to venereal disease, the  
'incurable bone-ache' of *Troilus & Cressida* V. i, 21; 'aches'  
pronounced as disyllable

204 *nones* nonce, occasion

211 *moccenigo* 'a kind of coine in Venice' (Florio 1598) perhaps worth  
nine gazets

212-213 *banner of my front* displayed upon the scaffold, listing  
maladies and cures

213 *bate* abate

213 *bagatine* 'a little coine in Italie' (Florio 1598) about a third of a  
farthing

216 *handkerchiefs* i.e. with the money knotted into a corner; the usual  
practice

218 *give it* i.e. the heroic spirit

220 *pistolet* Spanish gold coin, then worth about eighteen shillings

221 *spark* gallant, brave fellow

222 s.d. *Celia at the window* presumably on the tarras or in the  
window-stage; the text does not say when she first appears

over and above my oil, a secret of that high, and inestimable nature, shall make you for ever enamoured on that minute, wherein your eye first descended on so mean, yet not altogether to be despised, an object. Here is a poulder, concealed in this paper, of which, if I should speak to the worth, nine thousand volumes were but as one page, that page as a line, that line as a word: so short is this pilgrimage of man (which some call life) to the expressing of it. Would I reflect on the price? Why, the whole world were but as an empire, that empire as a province, that province as a bank, that bank as a private purse, to the purchase of it. I will, only, tell you; it is the poulder that made Venus a goddess, given her by Apollo, that kept her perpetually young, cleared her wrinkles, firmed her gums, filled her skin, coloured her hair; from her, derived to Helen, and at the sack of Troy, unfortunately, lost: till now, in this our age, it was as happily recovered, by a studious antiquary, out of some ruins of Asia, who sent a moiety of it, to the court of France (but much sophisticated), wherewith the ladies there, now, colour their hair. The rest, at this present, remains with me; extracted to a quintessence: so that, wherever it but touches, in youth it perpetually preserves, in age restores the complexion; seats your teeth, did they dance like virginal jacks, firm as a wall; makes them white, as ivory, that were black, as —

## Act II, Scene iii

[Enter CORVINO]

CORVINO

Spite o' the devil, and my shame! come down here;  
Come down! No house but mine to make your *scene*?

*He beats away the mountebank, &c.*

228 *poulder* powder; Jonson preferred this spelling (Latin *pulvis*)

242 *moiety* a half, or a part

243 *sophisticated* adulterated

247 *virginal jacks* strictly the pieces of wood bearing the quills of the virginals, but sometimes erroneously used for keys (the image derives from Rabelais)

1 *Spite o' F* (Q Bloud of); the first part of the line is probably to Celia, and the rest to Volpone; the F reading makes the wife the devil's agent

2 *scene* critical theory prescribed for a 'scene' a public place overlooked by private houses, and window scenes were common in the *commedia dell'arte*

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Signior Flaminio, will you down, sir? down!  
 What, is my wife your Franciscina, sir?  
 No windows on the whole Piazza, here,  
 To make your properties, but mine? but mine?  
 Heart! ere tomorrow, I shall be new christened,  
 And called the *Pantalone di Besogniosi*,  
 About the town.

5

[Exit]

PEREGRINE What should this mean, Sir Pol?

SIR POLITIC

Some trick of state, believe it. I will home.

10

PEREGRINE

It may be some design, on you.

SIR POLITIC

I know not.

I'll stand upon my guard.

PEREGRINE

It is your best, sir.

SIR POLITIC

This three weeks, all my advices, all my letters,  
 They have been intercepted.

PEREGRINE

Indeed, sir?

Best have a care.

SIR POLITIC

Nay, so I will.

PEREGRINE

This knight,

15

I may not lose him, for my mirth, till night.

## Act II, Scene iv

[VOLPONE's house]

[Enter] VOLPONE, MOSCA

VOLPONE

O, I am wounded,

MOSCA

Where, sir?

VOLPONE

Not without;

Those blows were nothing: I could bear them ever.

But angry Cupid, bolting from her eyes,

Hath shot himself into me, like a flame;

3 *Flaminio* Flaminio Scala, leading figure in the *commedia*, associated with Venice

4 *Franciscina* stock character of maid in the *commedia*

8 *Pantalone di Besogniosi* stock Venetian character in the *commedia*; a lean old man in loose slippers, black cap and gown, and red dress; his name derives him from a line of paupers, and it was often his role

3 *bolting* darting (olded its)

Where, now, he flings about his burning heat,  
 As in a furnace, an ambitious fire  
 Whose vent is stopped. The fight is all within me.  
 I cannot live, except thou help me, Mosca;  
 My liver melts, and I, without the hope  
 Of some soft air, from her refreshing breath,  
 Am but a heap of cinders.

10

MOSCA 'Las, good sir!

Would you had never seen her.

VOLPONE Nay, would thou

Hadst never told me of her.

MOSCA Sir, 'tis true;

I do confess, I was unfortunate,  
 And you unhappy: but I am bound in conscience,  
 No less than duty, to effect my best  
 To your release of torment, and I will, sir.

15

VOLPONE

Dear Mosca, shall I hope?

MOSCA Sir, more than dear,

I will not bid you to despair of ought,  
 Within a human compass.

VOLPONE O, there spoke

20

My better Angel. Mosca, take my keys,  
 Gold, plate and jewels, all's at thy devotion;  
 Employ them, how thou wilt; nay, coin me, too:  
 So thou, in this, but crown my longings.—Mosca?

MOSCA

Use but your patience.

VOLPONE So I have.

MOSCA I doubt not

25

To bring success to your desires.

VOLPONE Nay, then,

I not repent me of my late disguise.

MOSCA

If you can horn him, sir, you need not.

VOLPONE True:

Besides, I never meant him for my heir.

6 *ambitious fire* rising, swelling flames, recoiling to find other outlets

9 *liver* believed the seat of intense passions

22 *devotion* disposal, with pun on religious sense

23 *coin me* render me into coin

24 *crown* perfect, with pun on coin

24 —*Mosca?* expressing impatience at Mosca's thoughtful silence

28 *horn him* cuckold him

Is not the colour o' my beard, and eyebrows,  
To make me known?

MOSCA No jot.

VOLPONE I did it well.

MOSCA

So well, would I could follow you in mine,  
With half the happiness; and, yet, I would  
Escape your *epilogue*.

VOLPONE But, were they gulled  
With a belief, that I was Scoto?

MOSCA Sir,  
Scoto himself could hardly have distinguished!  
I have not time to flatter you, now, we'll part:  
And, as I prosper, so applaud my art.

35

[*Exeunt*]

## Act II, Scene v

[CORVINO's house]

[*Enter*] CORVINO, CELIA

CORVINO

Death of mine honour, with the city's fool?  
A juggling, tooth-drawing, prating mountebank?  
And at a public window? where, whilst he,  
With his strained action, and his dole of faces,  
To his drug lectures draws your itching ears,  
A crew of old, unmarried, noted lechers  
Stood leering up, like satyrs: and you smile  
Most graciously! and fan your favours forth,  
To give your hot spectators satisfaction!  
What, was your mountebank their call? their whistle?  
Or were you enamoured on his copper rings?  
His saffron jewel, with the toad-stone in't?

5

10

30 *colour* i.e. the fox's colour, red

32 *mine* i.e. 'my art' (of disguise and mimicry)

33 *happiness* felicitous aptitude

34 *your epilogue* i.e. the beating, but may hint at the end of Mosca's plot

2 *tooth-drawing* the responsibility of mountebanks and barbers

4 *strained action* extravagant gesture

4 *dole of faces* mean repertory of expressions

10 *call . . . whistle* alluding to the enticement of game-fowl

12 *toad-stone* believed to lie between the toad's eyes and to have magical and restorative properties (see *As You Like It* II. i, 12-14)

Or his embroidered suit, with the cope-stitch,  
 Made of a hearse-cloth? or his old tilt-feather?  
 Or his starched beard? Well! you shall have him, yes. 15  
 He shall come home, and minister unto you  
 The fricace, for the mother. Or, let me see,  
 I think, you'd rather mount? Would you not mount?  
 Why, if you'll mount, you may; yes truly, you may:  
 And so, you may be seen, down to th' foot. 20  
 Get you a cittern, Lady Vanity,  
 And be a dealer, with the virtuous man;  
 Make one: I'll but protest myself a cuckold,  
 And save your dowry. I am a Dutchman, I!  
 For, if you thought me an Italian, 25  
 You would be damned, ere you did this, you whore:  
 Thou'dst tremble, to imagine, that the murder  
 Of father, mother, brother, all thy race,  
 Should follow, as the subject of my justice.

CELIA

Good sir, have patience!

CORVINO

What couldst thou propose 30

Less to thyself, than, in this heat of wrath,  
 And stung with my dishonour, I should strike

[Takes his sword]

This steel into thee, with as many stabs,  
 As thou wert gazed upon with goatish eyes?

13 *cope-stitch* used to decorate a cope border

14 *hearse-cloth* coffin drapery, here either cheap or stolen

14 *tilt-feather* plume worn in tilting helmet; here perhaps found with the hearse-cloth

15 *starched beard* gummed and waxed beards were high fashion

17 *fricace*, for the mother massage for hysteria, believed to be seated in the womb; Corvino puns on suggestions of seduction and birth

18 *mount* i.e. the mountebank's platform, or the mountebank himself; another indecent pun affecting the meaning of 'down to the foot'

21 *cittern* kind of zither or guitar, often carried by a mountebank's wench

21 *Lady Vanity* a character in some morality plays, including that acted in *Sir Thomas More* IV. i

22 *be a dealer* do a deal, trade with (hinting at prostitution)

22 *virtuous man* with sneering pun on 'virtuoso'

23 *Make one* make a deal; mate 23 *protest* declare

24 *save your dowry* an adulteress was deprived of all her inheritance

24 *Dutchman* believed to be long-suffering and phlegmatic



Success hath made me wanton. I could skip 5  
 Out of my skin, now, like a subtle snake,  
 I am so limber. O! your parasite  
 Is a most precious thing, dropped from above,  
 Not bred 'mongst clods, and clotpoles, here on earth.  
 I muse the mystery was not made a science, 10  
 It is so liberally professed! Almost  
 All the wise world is little else, in nature,  
 But parasites, or sub-parasites. And yet,  
 I mean not those, that have your bare town-art,  
 To know, who's fit to feed 'em; have no house, 15  
 No family, no care, and therefore mould  
 Tales for men's ears, to bait that sense; or get  
 Kitchen-invention, and some stale receipts  
 To please the belly, and the groin; not those,  
 With their court-dog-tricks, that can fawn, and fleer, 20  
 Make their revèue out of legs and faces,  
 Echo my lord, and lick away a moth:  
 But your fine, elegant rascal, that can rise,  
 And stoop, almost together, like an arrow;  
 Shoot through the air, as nimbly as a star; 25  
 Turn short, as doth a swallow; and be here,  
 And there, and here, and yonder, all at once;  
 Present to any humour, all occasion;  
 And change a visor, swifter, than a thought!  
 This is the creature, had the art born with him; 30

6 *subtle* applied to the snake to signify its elusive movement, its texture and its traditional cunning

7 *limber* pliant, supple

10 *mystery* professional craft

10 *science* branch of formal knowledge

11 *liberally* 'widely practised by gentlemen'; Mosca puns on the sense describing the sciences 'worthy of a free man' (see *OED*)

14 *bare town-art* the minimal skills of a street parasite, described in lines 15-23

16-17 *mould Tales* concoct scandal, with suggestion of shaping traps for the ear

18 *Kitchen-invention* perhaps new ways of preparing old dishes ('stale receipts'); or possibly 'kitchen gossip'; invention need not imply novelty (see *OED*)

19 *groin* suggests that the receipts (recipes) include aphrodisiacs

20 *fleer* smile obsequiously

21 *legs and faces* bows and smirks

22 *lick* . . . *moth* servile grooming; 'moth' signified vermin in general

29 *visor* mask, hence 'expression' or 'role'

Toils not to learn it, but doth practise it  
 Out of most excellent nature: and such sparks,  
 Are the true parasites, others but their zanies.

## Act III, Scene ii

[Enter BONARIO]

MOSCA

Who's this? Bonario? old Corbaccio's son?  
 The person I was bound to seek. Fair sir,  
 You are happ'ly met.

BONARIO

That cannot be, by thee.

MOSCA

Why, sir?

BONARIO Nay, 'pray thee know thy way, and leave me:  
 I would be loath to interchange discourse,  
 With such a mate, as thou art.

5

MOSCA

Courteous sir,

Scorn not my poverty.

BONARIO

Not I, by heaven:

But thou shalt give me leave to hate thy baseness.

MOSCA

Baseness?

BONARIO Ay, answer me, is not thy sloth  
 Sufficient argument? thy flattery?  
 Thy means of feeding?

10

MOSCA

Heaven, be good to me.

These imputations are too common, sir,  
 And eas'ly stuck on virtue, when she's poor;  
 You are unequal to me, and howe'er  
 Your sentence may be righteous, yet you are not,  
 That ere you know me, thus, proceed in censure:  
 St. Mark bear witness 'gainst you, 'tis inhuman. [*weeps*]

15

BONARIO

What? does he weep? the sign is soft, and good!  
 I do repent me, that I was so harsh.

MOSCA

'Tis true, that, swayed by strong necessity,  
 I am enforced to eat my careful bread

20

33 *zanies* attendant clowns; see II. ii, 28, 114n.2 *bound* on my way14 *unequal* unjust, but with allusion to the difference of station21 *careful* hard-won

With too much obsequy; 'tis true, beside,  
 That I am fain to spin mine own poor raiment,  
 Out of my mere observance, being not born  
 To a free fortune: but that I have done 25  
 Base offices, in rending friends asunder,  
 Dividing families, betraying counsels,  
 Whispering false lies, or mining men with praises,  
 Trained their credulity with perjuries,  
 Corrupted chastity, or am in love 30  
 With mine own tender ease, but would not rather  
 Prove the most rugged, and laborious course,  
 That might redeem my present estimation;  
 Let me here perish, in all hope of goodness.

BONARIO

This cannot be a personated passion! 35  
 I was to blame, so to mistake thy nature;  
 'Pray thee forgive me: and speak out thy business.

MOSCA

Sir, it concerns you; and though I may seem,  
 At first, to make a main offence, in manners,  
 And in my gratitude, unto my master, 40  
 Yet, for the pure love, which I bear all right,  
 And hatred of the wrong, I must reveal it.  
 This very hour, your father is in purpose  
 To disinherit you—

BONARIO

How!

MOSCA

And thrust you forth,  
 As a mere stranger to his blood; 'tis true, sir: 45  
 The work no way engageth me, but, as  
 I claim an interest in the general state  
 Of goodness, and true virtue, which I hear  
 T'abound in you: and, for which mere respect,  
 Without a second aim, sir, I have done it. 50

BONARIO

This tale hath lost thee much of the late trust,  
 Thou hadst with me; it is impossible:  
 I know not how to lend it any thought,  
 My father should be so unnatural.

23 *fain* obliged24 *observance* dutiful service28 *mining* undermining29 *Trained* taken in, led on (see *OED*)32 *Prove* undergo39 *main* major49 *for . . . respect* for which reason alone

MOSCA

It is a confidence, that well becomes  
 Your piety; and formed, no doubt, it is,  
 From your own simple innocence: which makes  
 Your wrong more monstrous, and abhorred. But, sir,  
 I now, will tell you more. This very minute,  
 It is, or will be doing: and, if you  
 Shall be but pleased to go with me, I'll bring you,  
 I dare not say where you shall see, but where  
 Your ear shall be a witness of the deed;  
 Hear yourself written bastard: and professed  
 The common issue of the earth.

BONARIO

I'm mazed!

65

MOSCA

Sir, if I do it not, draw your just sword,  
 And score your vengeance, on my front, and face;  
 Mark me your villain: you have too much wrong,  
 And I do suffer for you, sir. My heart  
 Weeps blood, in anguish—

BONARIO

Lead. I follow thee.

70

## Act III, Scene iii

[VOLPONE's house]

[Enter VOLPONE, followed by NANO, ANDROGYNO and  
 CASTRONE]

VOLPONE

Mosca stays long, methinks. Bring forth your sports  
 And help to make the wretched time more sweet.

NANO

Dwarf, Fool, and Eunuch, well met here we be.

A question it were now, whether of us three,

Being, all, the known delicates of a rich man.

5

In pleasing him, claim the precedency can?

CASTRONE I claim for myself.

ANDROGYNO

And, so doth the fool.

56 *piety* filial love (Latin *pietas*)

64 *professed* proclaimed

65 *common . . . earth* of obscure or unknown parentage (Latin *terrae filius*)

67 *score* mark up

67 *front* forehead or face

4 *whether* which

5 *known delicates* acknowledged indulgences

NANO

'Tis foolish indeed: let me set you both to school.  
 First, for your dwarf, he's little, and witty,  
 And every thing, as it is little, is pretty; 10  
 Else, why do men say to a creature of my shape,  
 So soon as they see him, 'It's a pretty little ape?'  
 And, why a pretty ape? but for pleasing imitation  
 Of greater men's action, in a ridiculous fashion.  
 Beside, this feat body of mind doth not crave 15  
 Half the meat, drink, and cloth, one of your bulks will have.  
 Admit, your fool's face be the mother of laughter,  
 Yet, for his brain, it must always come after:  
 And, though that do feed him, it's a pitiful case,  
 His body is beholding to such a bad face. 20

*One knocks*

VOLPONE

Who's there? my couch; away, look Nano, see:  
 Give me my caps, first—go, enquire!

[*Exeunt NANO, ANDROGYNO, CASTRONE; VOLPONE to his bed*]

Now, Cupid

Send it be Mosca, and with fair return.

NANO [*At the door*]

It is the beauteous madam—

VOLPONE

Would-be—is it?

NANO

The same.

VOLPONE Now, torment on me; squire her in: 25  
 For she will enter, or dwell here for ever.  
 Nay, quickly, that my fit were past. I fear  
 A second hell too, that my loathing this  
 Will quite expel my appetite to the other:  
 Would she were taking, now, her tedious leave. 30  
 Lord, how it threatens me, what I am to suffer!

## Act III, Scene iv

[Enter NANO with LADY WOULD-BE]

LADY WOULD-BE

I thank you, good sir. Pray you signify  
 Unto your patron, I am here. This band  
 Shows not my neck enough—I trouble you, sir,  
 Let me request you, bid one of my women  
 Come hither to me—in good faith, I am dressed  
 Most favourably today, it is no matter,

5

[Enter 1st WOMAN]

'Tis well enough. Look, see, these petulant things!  
 How they have done this!

VOLPONE

I do feel the fever

Ent'ring, in at mine ears; O for a charm,  
 To fright it hence.

LADY WOULD-BE

Come nearer: is this curl

10

In his right place? or this? why is this higher  
 Than all the rest? you ha'not washed your eyes, yet?  
 Or do they not stand even i' your head?

Where's your fellow? call her. [Exit 1st WOMAN]

NANO

Now, St. Mark

Deliver us: anon, she'll beat her women,  
 Because her nose is red.

15

[Enter 1st WOMAN with 2nd WOMAN]

LADY WOULD-BE

I pray you, view

This tire, forsooth: are all things apt, or no?

1st WOMAN

One hair a little, here, sticks out, forsooth.

LADY WOULD-BE

Does't so forsooth? and where was your dear sight

When it did so, forsooth? what now? bird-eyed?

20

And you, too? pray you both approach, and mend it.

2 band ruff or collar

6 favourably pleasingly (but ironic)

15 anon shortly

17 tire head-dress

20 bird-eyed probably 'pop-eyed', startled; possibly 'short-sighted'  
 or 'timid'

Now, by that light, I muse, you're not ashamed  
 I, that have preached these things, so oft, unto you,  
 Read you the principles, argued all the grounds,  
 Disputed every fitness, every grace,  
 Called you to counsel of no frequent dressings

25

NANO *[aside]*

More carefully, than of your fame, or honour.

LADY WOULD BE

Made you acquainted, what an ample dowry  
 'The knowledge of these things would be unto you,  
 Able, alone, to get you noble husbands

30

At your return; and you, thus, to neglect it?

Besides, you seeing what a curious nation

'Th' Italians are, what will they say of me?

'The English lady cannot dress herself.'

Here's a fine imputation, to our country!

35

Well, go your ways, and stay, I'll the next room,

'This time was too coarse too, it's no matter.

Good ah, you'll give 'em entertainment?

*[Exeunt NANO, 1st and 2nd WOMEN]*

VOLPONE

'The storm comes toward me,

LADY WOULD BE

How does my Volp?

VOLPONE

Troubled with noise, I cannot sleep; I dreamt

40

'That a strange fury entered, now, my house,

And, with the dreadful tempest of her breath,

Did cleave my root and under.

LADY WOULD BE

Believe me, and I

Had the most fearful dream, could I remember 't

VOLPONE

Out on my fate; I ha' given her the occasion

45

How to torment me; she will tell me here,

LADY WOULD BE

Methought, the golden mediocrity

Polite, and delicate

VOLPONE

O, if you do love me,

21-25 predicted, i.e. gone Lady Would be deploys the terminology of total the title

22 own reputation

23-24 concern particular about details

25-26 connect the past

26-27-28-29-30-31-32-33-34-35-36-37-38-39-40-41-42-43-44-45-46-47-48-49-50-51-52-53-54-55-56-57-58-59-60-61-62-63-64-65-66-67-68-69-70-71-72-73-74-75-76-77-78-79-80-81-82-83-84-85-86-87-88-89-90-91-92-93-94-95-96-97-98-99-100

No more; I sweat, and suffer, at the mention  
Of any dream: feel, how I tremble yet.

50

LADY WOULD-BE

Alas, good soul! the passion of the heart.  
Seed-pearl were good now, boiled with syrup of apples,  
Tincture of gold, and coral, citron-pills,  
Your elecampane root, myrobalanes—

VOLPONE [*aside*]

Ay me, I have ta'en a grass-hopper by the wing.

55

LADY WOULD-BE

Burnt silk, and amber, you have muscadel  
Good i' the house—

VOLPONE

You will not drink, and part?

LADY WOULD-BE

No, fear not that. I doubt, we shall not get  
Some English saffron—half a dram would serve—  
Your sixteen cloves, a little musk, dried mints,  
Bugloss, and barley-meal—

60

VOLPONE

She's in again,

Before I feigned diseases, now I have one.

LADY WOULD-BE

And these applied, with a right scarlet cloth—

VOLPONE

Another flood of words! a very torrent!

LADY WOULD-BE

Shall I, sir, make you a poultice?

VOLPONE

No, no, no;

65

I'm very well: you need prescribe no more.

51 *passion of the heart* heartburn

52 *Seed-pearl* said by Burton to 'avail to the exhilaration of the heart'  
(*Anatomy of Melancholy* (1632), p. 376)

53 *coral* hung around the neck, supposed to drive away fears, devils  
and bad dreams

54 *elecampane* plant with bitter aromatic leaves and root, used as  
stimulant

54 *myrobalanes* astringent plum-like fruit prescribed for melancholy  
and agues

56 *Burnt silk* taken in water for the small-pox

56 *amber* used to perfume the air

59 *saffron* then grown in England (e.g. at Saffron Walden) for  
medical and confectionary use

61 *Bugloss* recommended by Burton as a heart stimulant (*Anatomy*  
(1632), p. 373)

63 *scarlet cloth* another treatment for small-pox; the patient was  
wrapped in it



LADY WOULD-BE

I have, a little, studied physic; but, now,  
 I'm all for music: save, i'the forenoons,  
 An hour, or two, for painting. I would have  
 A lady, indeed, to have all, letters, and arts, 70  
 Be able to discourse, to write, to paint,  
 But principal, as Plato holds, your music,  
 And so does wise Pythagoras, I take it,  
 Is your true rapture; when there is concent  
 In face, in voice, and clothes: and is, indeed, 75  
 Our sex's chiefest ornament.

VOLPONE

The poet,

As old in time, as Plato, and as knowing,  
 Says that your highest female grace is silence.

LADY WOULD-BE

Which o' your poets? Petrarch? or Tasso? or Dante?  
 Guarini? Ariosto? Aretine? 80  
 Cieco di Hadria? I have read them all.

VOLPONE

Is everything a cause, to my destruction?

LADY WOULD-BE

I think, I ha' two or three of 'em, about me.

VOLPONE

The sun, the sea will sooner, both, stand still,  
 Than her eternal tongue! nothing can scape it. 85

68 *forenoons* mornings74 *concent* harmony, concord76 *The poet* i.e. Sophocles, *Ajax* 293

81 *Cieco di Hadria* 'the blind man of Adria', Luigi Groto (1541-1585), a prolific, but minor, poet in comparison with the five first named

---

67-112 In this exchange Jonson appears to be fresh from a reading of the preface to Florio's *World of Words* (1598) where Florio commends Lucie, Countess of Bedford: '[You] by conceited industrie, or industrious conceit, in Italian as in French, in French as in Spanish, in all as in English, understand what you read, write as you read, and speak as you write; yet rather charge your mind with matter than your memory with words.' Florio observes the difficulties of Italian literature: 'And I have seen the best, yea natural Italians, not only stagger, but even stick fast in the myre, and at last give it over, or give their verdict with an *ignoramus*. Boccace is prettie hard, yet understood: *Petrarch* harder, but explained: *Dante* hardest, but commented. Some doubt if all right.' Lady Would-be is perhaps a would-be Countess of Bedford.

LADY WOULD-BE

Here's *Pastor Fido*—

VOLPONE

Profess obstinate silence,

That's now, my safest.

LADY WOULD-BE

All our English writers,

I mean such, as are happy in th'Italian,

Will deign to steal out of this author, mainly;

Almost as much, as from Montagnié:

He has so modern, and facile a vein,

Fitting the time, and catching the court-ear.

Your Petrarch is more passionate, yet he,

In days of sonneting, trusted 'em, with much:

Dante is hard, and few can understand him.

But, for a desperate wit, there's Aretine!

Only, his pictures are a little obscene—

You mark me not?

VOLPONE

Alas, my mind's perturb'd.

LADY WOULD-BE

Why, in such cases, we must cure ourselves,

Make use of our philosophy—

VOLPONE

O'y me!

LADY WOULD-BE

And, as we find our passions do rebel,

Encounter 'em with reason; or divert 'em,

By giving scope unto some other humour

Of lesser danger: as, in politic bodies,

There's nothing, more, doth overwhelm the judgement,

And clouds the understanding, than too much

Settling, and fixing, and (as't were) subsiding

Upon one object. For the incorporating

Of these same outward things, into that part,

86 *Pastor Fido* Guarini's pastoral (1590), translated into English as *The Faithful Shepherd* in 1602

90 *Montagnié* Q (F Montagnie); the Q accent suggests four syllables in pronunciation

94 *trusted . . . much* left much in their keeping; Petrarch was imitated as a sonneteer by Wyatt, Surrey, Sidney and Spenser, among others

96 *desperate wit* outrageous poet; Aretino wrote a number of pornographic poems including the sixteen *Sonnetti lussoriosi* which were published to designs by Giulio Romano in 1523

104 *politic bodies* kingdoms, states

105–112 *overwhelm . . . knowledge* Lady Would-be's theories of obsession and perception are a travesty of Platonic thinking



The cock-pit comes not near it. All my house,  
 But now, steamed like a bath, with her thick breath.  
 A lawyer could not have been heard; nor scarce  
 Another woman, such a hail of words  
 She has let fall. For hell's sake, rid her hence.

10

MOSCA

Has she presented?

VOLPONE

O, I do not care,

I'll take her absence, upon any price,

With any loss.

MOSCA

Madam—

LADY WOULD-BE

I ha'brought your patron

A toy, a cap here, of mine own work—

MOSCA

'Tis well,

15

I had forgot to tell you, I saw your knight,

Where you'd little think it—

LADY WOULD-BE

Where?

MOSCA

Marry,

Where yet, if you make haste, you may apprehend him,

Rowing upon the water in a gondola,

With the most cunning courtesan of Venice.

20

LADY WOULD-BE

Is't true?

MOSCA

Pursue 'em, and believe your eyes:

Leave me, to make your gift. [*Exit LADY WOULD-BE*] I knew  
 'twould take.

For lightly, they that use themselves most licence,

Are still most jealous.

VOLPONE

Mosca, hearty thanks,

For thy quick fiction, and delivery of me.

Now, to my hopes, what say'st thou?

25

[*Enter LADY WOULD-BE*]

LADY WOULD-BE

But do you hear, sir?—

VOLPONE

Again; I fear a paroxysm.

LADY WOULD-BE

Which way

Rowed they together?

MOSCA

Toward the Rialto.

7 *cock-pit* to be found in Venice or London; the Drury lane cock-pit was enclosed and later became a theatre; see Hogarth's print of the cock-pit in Birdcage Walk.

23 *lightly* often, usually

24 *still* always

LADY WOULD-BE

I pray you lend me your dwarf.

MOSCA

I pray you, take him.

[Exit LADY WOULD-BE]

Your hopes, sir, are like happy blossoms, fair,

30

And promise timely fruit, if you will stay

But the maturing; keep you, at your couch,

Corbaccio will arrive straight, with the will:

When he is gone, I'll tell you more.

VOLPONE

My blood,

My spirits are returned; I am alive:

35

And like your wanton gamester, at *primero*,

Whose thought had whispered to him, not go less,

Methinks I lie, and draw—for an encounter

[VOLPONE *draws the curtains across his bed*]

## Act III, Scene vi

[MOSCA *leads BONARIO in and hides him*]

MOSCA

Sir, here concealed, you may hear all. But pray you

Have patience, sir; (*One knocks*) the same's your father, knocks:

I am compelled to leave you.

BONARIO

Do so. Yet,

Cannot my thought imagine this a truth.

## Act III, Scene vii

[MOSCA *admits CORVINO and CELIA*]

MOSCA

Death on me! you are come too soon, what meant you?

Did not I say, I would send?

CORVINO

Yes, but I feared

You might forget it, and then they prevent us.

MOSCA

Prevent? [*aside*—Did e'er man haste so, for his horns?

A courtier would not ply it so, for a place.—

5

36 *primero* a gambling card-game resembling poker; Volpone puns on its technical terms 'go less', 'lie', 'draw' and 'encounter'

s.d. For the staging of this and subsequent scenes see p. xxix

2 *Did . . . send* see II. vi, 99

Well, now there's no helping it, stay here;  
I'll presently return. [*Moves toward BONARIO*]

CORVINO                               Where are you, Celia?

You know not wherefore I have brought you hither?

CELIA

Not well, except you told me.

CORVINO                               Now, I will:

Hark hither. [*They converse apart*]

MOSCA (*To BONARIO*)           Sir, your father hath sent word,                               10

It will be half an hour, ere he come;

And therefore, if you please to walk, the while,

Into that gallery—at the upper end,

There are some books to entertain the time:

And I'll take care, no man shall come unto you, sir.                               15

BONARIO

Yes, I will stay there. [*Aside*] I do doubt this fellow.

[*Exit BONARIO to the gallery*]

MOSCA

There, he is far enough; he can hear nothing:

And, for his father, I can keep him off. [*Moves to VOLPONE*]

CORVINO

Nay, now, there is no starting back; and therefore,

Resolve upon it: I have so decreed.   20

It must be done. Nor, would I move't afore,

Because I would avoid all shifts and tricks,

That might deny me.

CELIA

Sir, let me beseech you,

Affect not these strange trials; if you doubt

My chastity, why lock me up, for ever:   25

Make me the heir of darkness. Let me live,

Where I may please your fears, if not your trust.

CORVINO

Believe it, I have no such humour, I.

All that I speak, I mean; yet I am not mad:

Not horn-mad, see you? Go to, show yourself   30

Obedient, and a wife.

CELIA

O heaven!

9 *except* except what

21 *move* urge

24 *Affect* seek (not necessarily implying pretence)

24 *strange* exceptional, extreme

30 *horn-mad* mad at being cuckolded, mad at the prospect, or mad to be so

CORVINO

I say it,

Do so.

CELIA Was this the train?

CORVINO

I've told you reasons;

What the physicians have set down; how much,

It may concern me; what my engagements are;

My means; and the necessity of those means,

For my recovery: wherefore, if you be

Loyal, and mine, be won, respect my venture.

35

CELIA

Before your honour?

CORVINO

Honour? tut, a breath;

There's no such thing, in nature: a mere term

Invented to awe fools. What is my gold

The worse, for touching? clothes for being looked on?

Why, this's no more. An old, decrepit wretch,

That has no sense, no sinew; takes his meat

With others' fingers; only knows to gape,

When you do scald his gums; a voice; a shadow;

And what can this man hurt you?

40

45

CELIA

Lord! what spirit

Is this hath entered him?

CORVINO

And for your fame,

That's such a jig; as if I would go tell it,

Cry it, on the Piazza! who shall know it?

But he, that cannot speak it; and this fellow,

Whose lips are i' my pocket: save yourself,

If you'll proclaim't, you may. I know no other,

Should come to know it.

50

CELIA

Are heaven, and saints then nothing?

Will they be blind, or stupid?

CORVINO

How?

CELIA

Good sir,

Be jealous still, emulate them; and think

What hate they burn with, toward every sin.

55

CORVINO

I grant you: if I thought it were a sin,

I would not urge you. Should I offer this

To some young Frenchman, or hot Tuscan blood,

That had read Aretine, conned all his prints,

60

32 *train* trick, trap (see III. ii, 29)35 *means* financial resources37 *venture* enterprise43 *sense* sensory awareness48 *jig* trifle60 *prints* see III. iv, 96n.

Knew every quirk within lust's labyrinth,  
 And were professed critic, in lechery:  
 And I would look upon him, and applaud him,  
 This were a sin: but here, 'tis contrary,  
 A pious work, mere charity, for physic,  
 And honest polity, to assure mine own.

65

CELIA

O heaven! canst thou suffer such a change?

VOLPONE

Thou art mine honour, Mosca, and my pride,  
 My joy, my tickling, my delight! go, bring 'em.

MOSCA

Please you draw near, sir.

CORVINO

Come on, what—

70

You will not be rebellious? by that light—

[*Drags her to the bed*]

Sir, Signior Corvino, here, is come to see you—

VOLPONE

Oh!

MOSCA And hearing of the consultation had,  
 So lately, for your health, is come to offer,  
 Or rather, sir, to prostitute—

CORVINO

Thanks, sweet Mosca.

75

MOSCA

Freely, unasked, or unentreated—

CORVINO

Well.

MOSCA

As the true, fervent instance of his love,  
 His own most fair and proper wife; the beauty,  
 Only of price, in Venice—

CORVINO

'Tis well urged.

MOSCA

To be your comfortress, and to preserve you.

80

VOLPONE

Alas, I'm past already! pray you, thank him,  
 For his good care, and promptness, but for that,  
 'Tis a vain labour, e'en to fight 'gainst heaven;  
 Applying fire to a stone: —uh, uh, uh, uh.—  
 Making a dead leaf grow again. I take

85

61 *quirk* sudden twist

62 *professed critic* qualified expert

63 *And if*

66 *mine own* i.e. the inheritance

79 *Only of price* of unique excellence



His wishes gently, though; and, you may tell him,  
 What I've done for him: marry, my state is hopeless!  
 Will him, to pray for me; and t'use his fortune,  
 With reverence, when he comes to't.

MOSCA Do you hear, sir?

Go to him, with your wife.

CORVINO Heart of my father! 90

Wilt thou persist thus? come, I pray thee, come.

Thou seest 'tis nothing: Celia! by this hand

I shall grow violent. Come, do't, I say.

CELIA

Sir, kill me, rather: I will take down poison,

Eat burning coals, do anything—

CORVINO Be damned! 95

Heart, I will drag thee hence, home, by the hair;

Cry thee a strumpet, through the streets; rip up

Thy mouth, unto thine ears; and slit thy nose,

Like a raw rotchet—Do not tempt me, come.

Yield, I am loath—Death, I will buy some slave, 100

Whom I will kill, and bind thee to him, alive;

And at my window, hang you forth: devising

Some monstrous crime, which I, in capital letters,

Will eat into thy flesh, with aquafortis, 105

And burning corsives, on this stubborn breast.

Now, by the blood, thou hast incensed, I'll do't.

CELIA

Sir, what you please, you may; I am your martyr.

CORVINO

Be not thus obstinate, I ha' not deserved it:

Think, who it is, entreats you. Pray thee, sweet;

Good faith, thou shalt have jewels, gowns, attires, 110

What thou wilt think, and ask—Do, but, go kiss him.

Or touch him, but. For my sake. At my suit.

This once. No? not? I shall remember this.

Will you disgrace me, thus? do you thirst my undoing?

MOSCA

Nay, gentle lady, be advised.

CORVINO No, no. 115

95 *Eat . . . coals* Brutus's wife, Portia, died in this way

99 *rotchet* the red gurnet

100 *some slave* this was Tarquin's threat to Lucrece; see *Rape of Lucrece* 515, 671

104 *aquafortis* nitric acid, used for etching

105 *corsives* corrosives

She has watched her time. God's precious, this is scurvy;  
'Tis very scurvy: and you are—

MOSCA

Nay, good sir.

CORVINO

An errant locust, by heaven, a locust. Whore,  
Crocodile, that hast thy tears prepared,  
Expecting, how thou'lt bid 'em flow.

MOSCA

Nay, pray you, sir,

120

She will consider.

CELIA

Would my life would serve

To satisfy—

CORVINO

'Sdeath, if she would but speak to him,

And save my reputation, 'twere somewhat;

But, spitefully to affect my utter ruin—

MOSCA

Ay, now you've put your fortune in her hands.

125

Why i'faith, it is her modesty, I must quit her;

If you were absent, she would be more coming;

I know it: and dare undertake for her.

What woman can, before her husband? Pray you,

Let us depart, and leave her, here.

CORVINO

Sweet Celia,

130

Thou mayst redeem all, yet; I'll say no more:

If not, esteem yourself as lost. [CELIA starts to leave]. Nay,  
stay there. [Exeunt CORVINO, MOSCA]

CELIA

O God, and his good angels! whither, whither

Is shame fled human breasts? that with such ease,

Men dare put off your honours, and their own?

135

Is that, which ever was a cause of life,

Now placed beneath the basest circumstance?

And modesty an exile made, for money?

VOLPONE

Ay, in Corvino, and such earth-fed minds,

*He leaps off from his couch*

That never tasted the true heaven of love.

140

116 *God's precious* i.e. precious blood118 *errant* either 'wandering' or 'arrant, downright'; the senses are related and both applicable—'arrant, promiscuous parasite'119 *Crocodile* believed to entice its victims with artful tears120 *Expecting* anticipating124 *ruin*— (F ruin.) Q indicates that the thought is incomplete, or that Mosca interrupts it; some editors read 'ruin!'126 *quit* clear, acquit127 *coming* forthcoming, responsive

Assure thee, Celia, he that would sell thee,  
 Only for hope of gain, and that uncertain,  
 He would have sold his part of paradise  
 For ready money, had he met a cope-man.  
 Why art thou mazed, to see me thus revived? 145  
 Rather applaud thy beauty's miracle;  
 'Tis thy great work: that hath, not now alone,  
 But sundry times, raised me, in several shapes,  
 And, but this morning, like a mountebank,  
 To see thee at thy window. Ay, before 150  
 I would have left my practice, for thy love,  
 In varying figures, I would have contended  
 With the blue Proteus, or the hornèd flood.  
 Now, art thou welcome.

CELIA Sir!

VOLPONE Nay, fly me not. 155  
 Nor, let thy false imagination  
 That I was bedrid, make thee think, I am so:  
 Thou shalt not find it. I am, now, as fresh,  
 As hot, as high, and in as jovial plight,  
 As when, in that so celebrated scene,  
 At recitation of our comedy, 160  
 For entertainment of the great Valois,  
 I acted young Antinous; and attracted  
 The eyes, and ears of all the ladies present,  
 T'admire each graceful gesture, note, and footing.

*Song* 165

Come, my Celia, let us prove,  
 While we can, the sports of love;

- 144 *cope-man* chapman, dealer      145 *mazed* bewildered  
 151 *practice* scheming, intriguing  
 152 *figures* appearances, shapes  
 153 *blue Proteus* marine blue (Latin *caeruleus*); Menelaus contends  
 with the many shapes of Proteus (*Odyssey* IV. 456-458)  
 153 *hornèd flood* the river-god Achelous who fought Hercules in the  
 forms of bull, serpent, and man-bull; the shape may symbolise  
 the river's branchings and its roar  
 158 *jovial* born under Jupiter, and therefore apt to share Jove's con-  
 vivial temperament and amorous propensities  
 158 *plight* state, trim  
 161 *Valois* Henry of Valois was entertained at Venice in 1574  
 162 *Antinous* beautiful youth, minion of the Emperor Hadrian  
 165 *Song* imitated largely from Catullus's fifth ode, *Vivamus, mea*  
*Lesbia* (see pp. xv, xxx)      166 *prove* try

Time will not be ours, for ever,  
 He, at length, our good will sever;  
 Spend not then his gifts, in vain. 170  
 Suns, that set, may rise again:  
 But if, once, we lose this light,  
 'Tis with us perpetual night.  
 Why should we defer our joys?  
 Fame, and rumour are but toys. 175  
 Cannot we delude the eyes  
 Of a few poor household spies?  
 Or his easier ears beguile,  
 Thus removèd, by our wife?  
 'Tis no sin, love's fruits to steal; 180  
 But the sweet thefts to reveal:  
 To be taken, to be seen,  
 These have crimes accounted been.

CELIA

Some *serene* blast me, or dire lightning strike  
 This my offending face.

VOLPONE

Why droops my Celia? 185

Thou hast in place of a base husband, found  
 A worthy lover: use thy fortune well,  
 With secrecy, and pleasure. See, behold,  
 What thou art queen of; not in expectation,  
 As I feed others; but possessed, and crowned. 190  
 See, here, a rope of pearl; and each, more orient  
 Than that the brave Egyptian queen caroused:  
 Dissolve, and drink 'em. See, a carbuncle,  
 May put out both the eyes of our St. Mark;  
 A diamant, would have bought Lollia Paulina, 195

175 *toys* trifles184 *serene* (French *serein*) twilight mist in hot countries; once thought noxious191 *orient* rare and fine (see I. v, 9)192 *Egyptian queen* Pliny (*Naturalis Historia* IX.120) tells how Cleopatra met Antony's challenge to spend a hundred hundred thousand sesterces at a meal by drinking a priceless pearl dissolved in vinegar194 *both* . . . *St. Mark* perhaps an image of St. Mark with gems for eyes, but none is recorded; possibly two famous carbuncles in Venice, one in St. Mark's treasury; possibly an extravagant sacrilegious metaphor; see p. 164195 *Lollia Paulina* wife of the Emperor Caligula; an heiress whose wealth was extorted from the provinces by her father; Pliny describes her clad in jewels and glittering like the sun at a betrothal party; see Introduction p. xxiv

When she came in, like star-light, hid with jewels,  
 That were the spoils of provinces; take these,  
 And wear, and lose 'em: yet remains an ear-ring  
 To purchase them again, and this whole state.  
 A gem, but worth a private patrimony, 200  
 Is nothing: we will eat such at a meal.  
 The heads of parrots, tongues of nightingales,  
 The brains of peacocks, and of ostriches  
 Shall be our food: and, could we get the phoenix,  
 Though nature lost her kind, she were our dish. 205

CELIA

Good sir, these things might move a mind affected  
 With such delights; but I, whose innocence  
 Is all I can think wealthy, or worth th'enjoying,  
 And which once lost, I have nought to lose beyond it,  
 Cannot be taken with these sensual baits: 210  
 If you have conscience—

VOLPONE

'Tis the beggar's virtue,

If thou hast wisdom, hear me, Celia.  
 Thy baths shall be the juice of July-flowers,  
 Spirit of roses, and of violets,  
 The milk of unicorns, and panthers' breath 215  
 Gathered in bags, and mixed with Cretan wines.  
 Our drink shall be preparèd gold, and amber;  
 Which we will take, until my roof whirl round  
 With the vertigo: and my dwarf shall dance,  
 My eunuch sing, my fool make up the antic. 220  
 Whilst we, in changed shapes, act Ovid's tales,  
 Thou, like Europa now, and I like Jove,  
 Then I like Mars, and thou like Erycine,  
 So, of the rest, till we have quite run through

204 *phoenix* the mythical Arabian bird, supposed to renew itself from its own ashes every five hundred years

213 *July-flowers* gillyflowers (clove-scented pinks)

215 *milk of unicorns* a delicacy found only here; but powdered unicorn horn (from the rhinoceros) was used as medicine

215 *panthers' breath* panthers were said to attract their prey by the sweetness of their scent

216 *Cretan wines* rather rich and sweet for bathing (see I. i, 58); there is evidence that Mary Queen of Scots habitually bathed in wine

220 *antic* grotesque dance

221 *Ovid's tales* i.e. *Metamorphoses*

222 *Europa* . . . *Jove* Zeus won Europa by playing with her in the form of a bull before bearing her to Crete on his back

223 *Erycine* Venus, after her temple at Eryx in Sicily

And wearied all the fables of the gods. 225  
 Then will I have thee in more modern forms,  
 Attired like some sprightly dame of France,  
 Brave Tuscan lady, or proud Spanish beauty;  
 Sometimes, unto the Persian Sophy's wife;  
 Or the Grand Signor's mistress; and, for change, 230  
 To one of our most artful courtesans,  
 Or some quick Negro, or cold Russian;  
 And I will meet thee, in as many shapes:  
 Where we may, so, transfuse our wand'ring souls,  
 Out at our lips, and score up sums of pleasures, [*Sings*] 235  
     That the curious shall not know,  
     How to tell them, as they flow;  
     And the envious, when they find  
     What their number is, be pined.

CELIA

If you have ears that will be pierced; or eyes, 240  
 That can be opened; a heart, may be touched;  
 Or any part, that yet sounds man, about you:  
 If you have touch of holy saints, or heaven,  
 Do me the grace, to let me scape. If not,  
 Be bountiful, and kill me. You do know, 245  
 I am a creature, hither ill betrayed,  
 By one, whose shame I would forget it were.  
 If you will deign me neither of these graces,  
 Yet feed your wrath, sir, rather than your lust;  
 (It is a vice, comes nearer manliness) 250  
 And punish that unhappy crime of nature,  
 Which you miscall my beauty: flay my face,  
 Or poison it, with ointments, for seducing  
 Your blood to this rebellion. Rub these hands,  
 With what may cause an eating leprosy, 255  
 E'en to my bones, and marrow: anything,  
 That may disfavour me, save in my honour.

229 *Sophy* the Shah, supreme ruler230 *Grand Signor* Sultan of Turkey232 *quick* lively234 *transfuse* 'to cause to flow from one to another' (*OED*); the image is from Petronius, *Satyricon* 79239 *pined* tormented

240-260 For the Quarto punctuation of this speech see p. 169

242 *sounds man* proclaims you a man; see Introduction p. xiii, for discussion of 'virtue'257 *disfavour* disfigure

And I will kneel to you, pray for you, pay down  
A thousand hourly vows, sir, for your health,  
Report, and think you virtuous—

VOLPONE Think me cold, 260

Frozen, and impotent, and so report me?

That I had Nestor's hernia, thou wouldst think.

I do degenerate, and abuse my nation,

To play with opportunity, thus long:

I should have done the act, and then have parleyed. 265

Yield, or I'll force thee.

CELIA O! just God.

VOLPONE In vain—

[BONARIO] *leaps out from where Mosca had placed him*

BONARIO

Forbear, foul ravisher, libidinous swine,

Free the forced lady, or thou diest, impostor.

But that I am loath to snatch thy punishment

Out of the hand of justice, thou shouldst, yet, 270

Be made the timely sacrifice of vengeance,

Before this altar, and this dross, thy idol.

Lady, let's quit the place, it is the den

Of villainy; fear nought, you have a guard:

And he, ere long, shall meet his just reward. 275

VOLPONE

Fall on me, roof, and bury me in ruin,

Become my grave, that wert my shelter. O!

I am unmasked, unspirited, undone,

Betrayed to beggary, to infamy—

### Act III, Scene viii

[Enter MOSCA, *bleeding*]

MOSCA

Where shall I run, most wretched shame of men,  
To beat out my unlucky brains?

262 *Nestor's hernia* Nestor embodies the strengths as well as the weaknesses of age in Homer's *Iliad*; this glance at his impotence is from Juvenal, *Satires* VI, 326

263 *degenerate* possibly used transitively 'cause my nation (Italy) to lose its ancestral virtue', but the intransitive use is more probable

272 *dross* 'the scum thrown off from metals in smelting' (*OED*); a perverse dismissal of Volpone's gold

VOLPONE

Here, here.

What! dost thou bleed?

MOSCA

O, that his well-driven sword

Had been so courteous to have cleft me down,

Unto the navel; ere I lived to see

5

My life, my hopes, my spirits, my patron, all

Thus desperately engagèd, by my error.

VOLPONE

Woe, on thy fortune.

MOSCA

And my follies, sir.

VOLPONE

Th'hast made me miserable.

MOSCA

And myself, sir.

Who would have thought, he would have hearkened, so?

10

VOLPONE

What shall we do?

MOSCA

I know not, if my heart

Could expiate the mischance, I'd pluck it out.

Will you be pleased to hang me? or cut my throat?

And I'll requite you, sir. Let's die like Romans,

Since we have lived, like Grecians. *They knock without*

VOLPONE

Hark, who's there?

15

I hear some footing, officers, the Saffi

Come to apprehend us! I do feel the brand

Hissing already, at my forehead: now,

Mine ears are boring.

MOSCA

To your couch, sir, you

Make that place good, however. Guilty men

20

Suspect, what they deserve still. Signior Corbaccio!

7 *engagèd* entangled14 *like Romans* Stoically, by suicide15 *like Grecians* dissolutely and histrionically (see Juvenal, *Satires* III. 100ff.)16 *footing* footsteps16 *Saffi* 'Saffo, a catchpole, or sergeant' (Florio 1598); bailiffs17 *brand* Jonson himself was branded on the thumb for killing Gabriel Spencer (see p. vii)19 *boring* this suggests ear-rings or ear-brandings for criminals, but no other evidence has been brought to bear20 *Make . . . however* 'keep up that role whatever you do'



## Act III, Scene ix

[Enter CORBACCIO]

CORBACCIO

Why! how now? Mosca!

[Enter VOLTRE *unseen*]

MOSCA

O, undone, amazed, sir.

Your son, I know not by what accident,  
 Acquainted with your purpose to my patron,  
 Touching your will, and making him your heir;  
 Entered our house with violence, his sword drawn,  
 Sought for you, called you wretch, unnatural,  
 Vowed he would kill you.

5

CORBACCIO

Me?

MOSCA

Yes, and my patron.

CORBACCIO

This act, shall disinherit him indeed:  
 Here is the will.

MOSCA

'Tis well, sir.

CORBACCIO

Right and well.

Be you as careful now, for me.

MOSCA

My life, sir,

10

Is not more tendered, I am only yours.

CORBACCIO

How does he? will he die shortly, thinkst thou?

MOSCA

I fear

He'll outlast May.

CORBACCIO

Today?

MOSCA

No, last out May, sir.

CORBACCIO

Couldst thou not gi' him a dram?

MOSCA

O, by no means, sir.

CORBACCIO

Nay, I'll not bid you.

VOLTRE [*Aside*]

This is a knave, I see.

15

MOSCA [*Aside*]

How! Signior Voltore! did he hear me?

VOLTRE

Parasite!

1 *amazed* confused8 *disinherit* . . . *indeed* i.e. permanently10 *careful* solicitous11 *tendered* tenderly cared for14 *dram* dose

MOSCA

Who's that? O, sir, most timely welcome—

VOLTORE

Scarce,

To the discovery of your tricks, I fear.

You are his, only? and mine, also? are you not?

MOSCA

Who? I, sir!

VOLTORE

You, sir. What device is this

20

About a will?

MOSCA

A plot for you, sir.

VOLTORE

Come,

Put not your foists upon me, I shall scent 'em.

MOSCA

Did you not hear it?

VOLTORE

Yes, I hear, Corbaccio

Hath made your patron, there, his heir.

MOSCA

'Tis true,

25

By my device, drawn to it by my plot,

With hope—

VOLTORE

Your patron should reciprocate?

And, you have promised?

MOSCA

For your good, I did, sir.

Nay more, I told his son, brought, hid him here,

Where he might hear his father pass the deed;

Being persuaded to it, by this thought, sir,

30

That the unnaturalness, first, of the act,

And then, his father's oft disclaiming in him,

Which I did mean t'help on, would sure enrage him

To do some violence upon his parent.

On which the law should take sufficient hold,

35

And you be stated in a double hope:

Truth be my comfort, and my conscience,

My only aim was, to dig you a fortune

Out of these two, old rotten sepulchres—

VOLTORE

I cry thee mercy, Mosca.

MOSCA

Worth your patience,

40

And your great merit, sir. And, see the change!

VOLTORE

Why? what success?

20 *device* contrivance22 *foists* rogueries; also foist, 'to smell or grow musty' (OED)32 *disclaiming in him* disowning; renouncing legal claim36 *stated* instated42 *success* outcome

MOSCA                               Most hapless! you must help, sir.  
 Whilst we expected th'old raven, in comes  
 Corvino's wife, sent hither, by her husband—

VOLTORE

What, with a present?

MOSCA                               No, sir, on visitation:

45

(I'll tell you how, anon) and, staying long,  
 The youth, he grows impatient, rushes forth,  
 Seizeth the lady, wounds me, makes me swear  
 (Or he would murder her, that was his vow)

50

T'affirm my patron to have done her rape:  
 Which how unlike it is, you see! and, hence,  
 With that pretext, he's gone, t'accuse his father;  
 Defame my patron; defeat you—

VOLTORE

Where's her husband?

Let him be sent for, straight.

MOSCA

Sir, I'll go fetch him.

VOLTORE

Bring him, to the Scrutineo.

MOSCA

Sir, I will.

55

VOLTORE

This must be stopped.

MOSCA

O, you do nobly, sir.

Alas, 'twas laboured all, sir, for your good;  
 Nor, was there any want of counsel, in the plot:  
 But fortune can, at any time, o'erthrow  
 The projects of a hundred learned clerks, sir.

60

CORBACCIO

What's that?

VOLTORE

Wilt please you sir, to go along?

[*Exeunt* CORBACCIO, VOLTORE]

MOSCA

Patron, go in, and pray for our success.

VOLPONE

Need makes devotion: heaven your labour bless.

42 *hapless* unfortunate

50 *to have* F (Q would have)

55 *Scrutineo* law court in Senate House

60 *clerks* scholars

## Act IV, Scene i

[A Street]

[Enter SIR POLITIC WOULD-BE, PEREGRINE]

SIR POLITIC

I told you, sir, it was a plot: you see  
 What observation is. You mentioned me,  
 For some instructions: I will tell you, sir,  
 Since we are met, here, in this height of Venice,  
 Some few particulars, I have set down,  
 Only for this meridian; fit to be known  
 Of your crude traveller, and they are these.  
 I will not touch, sir, at your phrase, or clothes,  
 For they are old.

5

PEREGRINE Sir, I have better.

SIR POLITIC Pardon,

I meant, as they are themes.

PEREGRINE O, sir, proceed:

10

I'll slander you no more of wit, good sir.

SIR POLITIC

First, for your garb, it must be grave, and serious;  
 Very reserved, and locked; not tell a secret,  
 On any terms, not to your father; scarce  
 A fable, but with caution; make sure choice  
 Both of your company, and discourse; beware,  
 You never speak a truth—

15

PEREGRINE How!

SIR POLITIC Not to strangers,  
 For those be they you must converse with, most;  
 Others I would not know, sir, but at distance,

1 *it was a plot* i.e. the mountebank scene2 *mentioned me* asked me in passing (?); Sir Politic resumes this false presumption from II. i, 1204 *height* latitude8 *your* the impersonal, familiar use which Peregrine affects to misinterpret8 *phrase* manner of speaking10 *themes* topics11 *slander . . . wit* either 'I'll no more misrepresent you for the sake of being witty', or 'I'll no more accuse you of being quick-witted'. The first sense is for Sir Politic, the second for us12 *garb* demeanour15 *fable* fiction19 *know* acknowledge

So as I still might be a saver, in 'em: 20  
 You shall have tricks, else, passed upon you hourly.  
 And then, for your religion, profess none;  
 But wonder, at the diversity of all;  
 And, for your part, protest, were there no other  
 But simply the laws o'the land, you could content you: 25  
 Nick Machiavel, and Monsieur Bodin, both,  
 Were of this mind. Then, must you learn the use,  
 And handling of your silver fork, at meals;  
 The metal of your glass—these are main matters,  
 With your Italian—and to know the hour, 30  
 When you must eat your melons, and your figs.

PEREGRINE

Is that a point of state, too?

SIR POLITIC

Here it is.

For your Venetian, if he see a man  
 Preposterous, in the least, he has him straight;  
 He has: he strips him. I'll acquaint you, sir, 35  
 I now have lived here, 'tis some fourteen months,  
 Within the first week of my landing here,  
 All took me for a citizen of Venice:  
 I knew the forms so well—

PEREGRINE [*Aside*]

And nothing else.

SIR POLITIC

I had read Contarene, took me a house, 40  
 Dealt with my Jews, to furnish it with moveables—  
 Well, if I could but find one man—one man,  
 To mine own heart—whom I durst trust, I would—

20 *be . . . 'em* 'keep myself safe in respect to them' (either from danger or from inconvenience)

26 *Machiavel . . . Bodin* the sentiments are falsely attributed, but Machiavelli did tend to subordinate religion to the state, and Jean Bodin elaborated a theory of toleration

28 *fork* forks were not much used in England at this time (see *The Devil is an Ass* V. iv, 18)

29 *metal* 'the material used for making glass, in a molten state' (OED); Sir Politic is exhibiting his technical knowledge

29 *main* of primary importance

34 *Preposterous* back-to-front, in the wrong order

34 *has him straight* sums him up instantly

40 *Contarene* Cardinal Gasparo Contarini published a book on Venice, *De Magistratibus et Republica Venetorum* (1589), translated into English in 1599

41 *moveables* at this time commonly distinguished from fixed furnishings

PEREGRINE

What? what, sir?

SIR POLITIC            Make him rich; make him a fortune:

He should not think, again. I would command it. 45

PEREGRINE

As how?

SIR POLITIC With certain projects, that I have,

Which, I may not discover.

PEREGRINE [*Aside*]            If I had

But one to wager with, I would lay odds, now,

He tells me, instantly.

SIR POLITIC            One is (and that

I care not greatly, who knows) to serve the state 50

Of Venice, with red herrings, for three years,

And at a certain rate, from Rotterdam,

Where I have correspondence. There's a letter,

Sent me from one o' the States, and to that purpose;

He cannot write his name, but that's his mark. 55

PEREGRINE

He is a chandler?

SIR POLITIC            No, a cheesemonger.

There are some other too, with whom I treat,

About the same negotiation;

And, I will undertake it: for, 'tis thus,

I'll do 't with ease, I've cast it all. Your hoy 60

Carries but three men in her, and a boy;

And she shall make me three returns, a year:

So, if there come but one of three, I save,

If two, I can defalk. But, this is now,

If my main project fail.

PEREGRINE            Then, you have others? 65

SIR POLITIC

I should be loath to draw the subtle air

Of such a place, without my thousand aims.

I'll not dissemble, sir, where'er I come

47 *discover* reveal            53 *correspondence* connections54 *one o' the States* a member of the Dutch assembly, the States-General56 *chandler?* Peregrine speculates from the greasy state of the letter60 *cast* reckoned60 *hoy* Dutch coastal vessel, meant for short hauls64 *defalk* allow a deduction, perhaps on the price of the herrings, but the financial strategy is obscure66 *subtle air* atmosphere of intrigue

I love to be considerative; and, 'tis true,  
 I have, at my free hours, thought upon 70  
 Some certain goods, unto the state of Venice,  
 Which I do call my cautions: and, sir, which  
 I mean, in hope of pension, to propound  
 To the Great Council, then unto the Forty,  
 So to the Ten. My means are made already— 75

PEREGRINE

By whom?

SIR POLITIC Sir, one, that though his place be obscure,  
 Yet, he can sway, and they will hear him. He's  
*A commendatore.*

PEREGRINE

What, a common sergeant?

SIR POLITIC

Sir, such as they are, put it in their mouths,  
 What they should say, sometimes: as well as greater. 80  
 I think I have my notes, to show you—

PEREGRINE

Good, sir.

SIR POLITIC

But, you shall swear unto me, on your gentry,  
 Not to anticipate—

PEREGRINE

I, sir?

SIR POLITIC

Nor reveal

A circumstance—My paper is not with me.

PEREGRINE

O, but, you can remember, sir.

SIR POLITIC

My first is, 85

Concerning tinder-boxes. You must know,  
 No family is, here, without its box.

Now sir, it being so portable a thing,

Put case, that you, or I were ill affected

Unto the state; sir, with it in our pockets, 90

Might not I go into the *arsenale*?

Or you? come out again? and none the wiser?

69 *considerative* prudently deliberate

72 *cautions* can mean 'precautions', but taken here 'in hope of pension'

74-75 *Great . . . Ten* the administrative hierarchy of Venice

75 *means* means of access, contacts

78 *sergeant* officer charged with the arrest or summoning of offenders

79 *their mouths* i.e. the mouths of the great

89 *Put case* 'say for example'

91 *arsenale* Sir Politic may use the Italian pronunciation; the Arsenal of Venice housed all its ships and weapons

PEREGRINE

Except yourself, sir.

SIR POLITIC

Go to, then. I, therefore,

Advertise to the state, how fit it were,

That none, but such as were known patriots,

Sound lovers of their country, should be suffered

T' enjoy them in their houses: and, even those,

Sealed, at some office, and, at such a bigness,

As might not lurk in pockets.

PEREGRINE

Admirable!

SIR POLITIC

My next is, how t'enquire, and be resolved,

By present demonstration, whether a ship,

Newly arrived from Soria, or from

Any suspected part of all the Levant,

Be guilty of the plague: and, where they use,

To lie out forty, fifty days, sometimes,

About the Lazaretto, for their trial;

I'll save that charge, and loss unto the merchant,

And, in an hour, clear the doubt.

PEREGRINE

Indeed, sir?

SIR POLITIC

Or—I will lose my labour.

PEREGRINE

My faith, that's much.

SIR POLITIC

Nay, sir, conceive me. 'Twill cost me, in onions,

Some thirty *livres*—

PEREGRINE

Which is one pound sterling.

SIR POLITIC

Beside my water-works: for this I do, sir.

First, I bring in your ship, 'twixt two brick walls;

(But those the state shall venture) on the one

I strain me a fair tarpaulin; and, in that,

94 *Advertise* make known98 *Sealed* registered under seal101 *present demonstration* on-the-spot proof102 *Soria* Syria106 *Lazaretto* pest-house; two were established in islands of the Gulf of Venice after the plagues of 1423 and 1576110 *onions* supposed to protect against the plague by gathering the infection111 *livre* French coin114 *venture* invest in115 *strain* stretch

95

100

105

110

115





145

Nay, sir, read forth.

[Enter LADY WOULD-BE, NANO *and* two WOMEN]

10 demerit merits blame

PEREGRINE                   It seems, you are not jealous,  
That dare commend her.

SIR POLITIC                   Nay, and for discourse—

15

PEREGRINE

Being your wife, she cannot miss that.

SIR POLITIC [*The parties meet*]                   Madam,  
Here is a gentleman, pray you, use him, fairly,  
He seems a youth, but he is—

LADY WOULD-BE                   None?

SIR POLITIC                   Yes, one

Has put his face, as soon, into the world—

LADY WOULD-BE

You mean, as early? but today?

SIR POLITIC                   How's this!

20

LADY WOULD-BE

Why in this habit, sir, you apprehend me.

Well, Master Would-be, this doth not become you;

I had thought, the odour, sir, of your good name,

Had been more precious to you; that you would not

Have done this dire massacre, on your honour;

25

One of your gravity, and rank, besides!

But, knights, I see, care little for the oath

They make to ladies: chiefly, their own ladies.

SIR POLITIC

Now, by my spurs, the symbol of my knight-hood—

PEREGRINE [*Aside*]

Lord! how his brain is humbled, for an oath.

30

SIR POLITIC

I reach you not.

LADY WOULD-BE   Right, sir, your polity

May bear it through, thus. [*To PEREGRINE*] Sir, a word with you.

I would be loath, to contest publicly,

With any gentlewoman; or to seem

Froward, or violent (as *The Courtier* says)

35

16 *miss lack*

19 *as soon* at so early an age; but the phrase is open to Lady Would-be's wilful misinterpretation

25 *massacre* accented on second syllable here

30 *humbled* brought low—down to his spurs; editors have here found a sneer at King James's readiness to create new knights (see *The Alchemist* II. ii, 86–87)                   31 *reach* understand

31 *polity* policy, cunning bluff

32 *bear it through* carry it off

35 *Froward* refractory

35 *The Courtier* alluding to Castiglione, *The Courtier* Bk. 3

It comes too near rusticity, in a lady,  
Which I would shun, by all means: and, however  
I may deserve from Master Would-be, yet,  
T'have one fair gentlewoman, thus, be made  
Th'unkind instrument, to wrong another,  
And one she knows not; ay, and to persever:  
In my poor judgement, is not warranted  
From being a solecism in our sex,  
If not in manners.

PEREGRINE                      How is this!

SIR POLITIC                      Sweet madam,

Come nearer to your aim.

LADY WOULD-BE                      Marry, and will, sir.

Since you provoke me, with your impudence,

And laughter of your light land-siren, here,

Your Sporus, your hermaphrodite—

PEREGRINE                      What's here?

Poetic fury, and historic storms!

SIR POLITIC

The gentleman, believe it, is of worth,

And of our nation.

LADY WOULD-BE                      Ay, your Whitefriars nation!

Come, I blush for you, Master Would-be, I;

And am ashamed, you should ha' no more forehead,

Than, thus, to be the patron, or St. George

To a lewd harlot, a base fricatrice,

A female devil, in a male outside.

SIR POLITIC [*To PEREGRINE*]                      Nay,

And you be such a one, I must bid adieu

To your delights! The case appears too liquid.

[*Exit SIR POLITIC*]

41 *persever* accented on second syllable

43 *solecism* a grammatical, not a sexual, impropriety; the word is itself a solecism here

48 *Sporus* minion castrated and 'married' by Nero

49 *historic* perhaps 'epoch-making'

51 *Whitefriars nation* Whitefriars was a 'liberty' under the old priory charter, inside the City of London but outside its jurisdiction; it became almost a miniature state for outcasts

53 *forehead* 'capacity for blushing, modesty' (*OED*)

55 *fricatrice* whore (Latin *fricare*, to rub)

57 *you be* addressed either to Lady Would-be or to Peregrine

58 *case* possibly 'mask' or 'disguise'

58 *liquid* 'transparent, easily seen through' or 'amorphous, hard to grasp'; and Lady Would-be may be sobbing

LADY WOULD-BE

Ay, you may carry't clear, with your state-face!

But, for your carnival concupiscence, 60

Who here is fled for liberty of conscience,

From furious persecution of the marshal,

Her will I disple.

PEREGRINE This is fine, i'faith!

And do you use this, often? is this part

Of your wit's exercise, 'gainst you have occasion? 65

Madam—

LADY WOULD-BE Go to, sir.

PEREGRINE Do you hear me, lady?

Why, if your knight have set you to beg shirts,

Or to invite me home, you might have done it

A nearer way, by far.

LADY WOULD-BE This cannot work you,

Out of my snare.

PEREGRINE Why? am I in it, then? 70

Indeed, your husband told me, you were fair,

And so you are; only your nose inclines,

That side, that's next the sun, to the queen-apple.

LADY WOULD-BE

This cannot be endured, by any patience.

## Act IV, Scene iii

[Enter MOSCA]

MOSCA

What's the matter, madam?

LADY WOULD-BE If the Senate

59 *state-face* politic countenance60 *carnival* pre-lenten festivals were notoriously licentious in Venice, but Lady Would-be probably confounds her phrase with 'carnal concupiscence'60 *concupiscence* for 'concupiscent (woman)'61 *liberty of conscience* freedom from religious persecution; the prison marshal is conceived as the persecutor and concupiscence as the religion63 *disple* ed. (FQ *disc'ple*) 'to subject to discipline; especially as a religious practice' (OED) 64 *use this* act like this67 *beg shirts* Lady Would-be is evidently tugging at Peregrine's shirt69 *nearer* more direct73 *queen-apple* perhaps a quince, or early variety of apple; Lady Would-be's nose is red on one side (see III. iv, 16)

Right not my quest, in this; I will protest 'em,  
To all the world, no aristocracy.

MOSCA

What is the injury, lady?

LADY WOULD-BE

Why, the callet,

You told me of, here I have ta'en disguised.

5

MOSCA

Who? this? what means your ladyship? the creature  
I mentioned to you, is apprehended, now,  
Before the Senate, you shall see her—

LADY WOULD-BE

Where?

MOSCA

I'll bring you to her. 'This young gentleman  
I saw him land, this morning, at the port.

10

LADY WOULD-BE

Is't possible! how has my judgement wandered!  
Sir, I must, blushing, say to you, I have erred:  
And plead you pardon.

PEREGRINE

What! more changes, yet?

LADY WOULD-BE

I hope, you ha'not the malice to remember  
A gentlewoman's passion. If you stay,  
In Venice, here, please you to use me, sir—

15

MOSCA

Will you go, madam?

LADY WOULD-BE

Pray you, sir, use me. In faith,

The more you see me, the more I shall conceive,  
You have forgot our quarrel.

PEREGRINE

'This is rare!

Sir Politic Would-be? no, Sir Politic Bawd!  
'To bring me, thus, acquainted with his wife!  
Well, wise Sir Pol: since you have practised, thus,  
Upon my freshmanship, I'll try your salt-head,  
What proof it is against a counter-plot.

20

2 *quest* petition

2 *protest* proclaim

16 *use me* Lady Would-be intends to be socially useful but her rhetoric insinuates her readiness to be Peregrine's mistress

18 *conceive* understand; become pregnant

22 *practised* plotted; Peregrine thinks he has been gulled

23 *salt-head* seasoned, experienced; salacious, bawdy

## Act IV, Scene iv

[*The Scrutineo*][*Enter*] VOLTORE, CORBACCIO, CORVINO, MOSCA

VOLTORE

Well, now you know the carriage of the business,  
 Your constancy is all, that is required  
 Unto the safety of it.

MOSCA

Is the lie

Safely conveyed amongst us? is that sure?  
 Knows every man his burden?

CORVINO

Yes.

MOSCA

Then, shrink not.

5

CORVINO [*Aside to MOSCA*]

But, knows the advocate the truth?

MOSCA

O, sir,

By no means. I devised a formal tale,  
 That salved your reputation. But, be valiant, sir.

CORVINO

I fear no one, but him; that, this his pleading  
 Should make him stand for a co-heir—

MOSCA

Co-halter.

10

Hang him: we will but use his tongue, his noise,  
 As we do Croaker's, here. [*Pointing to CORBACCIO*]

CORVINO

Ay, what shall he do?

1 *carriage* management5 *burden* refrain of a song; hence 'part in the performance'7 *formal* 'elaborately constructed, circumstantial' (*OED*)8 *salved* healed, made good

12–20 de Vocht objects to the Folio directions (here inserted in round brackets) on the ground that they misinterpret the text. His remedial interventions, however, including the reassignment of 'I should . . . past' to Voltore, and the revision of line 20 with a redirection to Voltore ('But you shall eat it. Much worshipful sir,'), are as drastic as the Folio's and have no authority. I have retained the Folio interpretation from the conviction that Jonson at least tolerated it. The aside in line 16 is indicated in F by a dash only; although the diffidence seems uncharacteristic of Mosca it is not outside an actor's compass. Lines 17–19 are probably shouted at Corbaccio, for Corvino must overhear them if he is to make sense of line 20. Gifford and others since have read Mosca's 'Much!' of line 20 as an aside, but there is no reason why Voltore should not receive it as an ironic confidence—each gull supposes himself one up on the others.

MOSCA

When we ha' done, you mean?

CORVINO

Yes.

MOSCA

Why, we'll think:

Sell him for mummia, he's half dust already.

(To VOLTRE) Do not you smile, to see this buffalo,

15

[Pointing to CORVINO]

How he doth sport it with his head?—[Aside] I should

If all were well, and past. (To CORBACCIO) Sir, only you

Are he, that shall enjoy the crop of all,

And these not know for whom they toil.

CORBACCIO

Ay, peace.

MOSCA (To CORVINO)

But you shall eat it. (then to VOLTRE again) Much!

20

Worshipful sir,

Mercury sit upon your thund'ring tongue,

Or the French Hercules, and make your language

As conquering as his club, to beat along,

As with a tempest, flat, our adversaries:

But, much more, yours, sir.

VOLTRE

Here they come, ha' done.

25

MOSCA

I have another witness, if you need, sir,

I can produce.

VOLTRE

Who is it?

MOSCA

Sir, I have her.

## Act IV, Scene v

[Enter four AVOCATORI, BONARIO, CELIA, NOTARIO,  
COMMENDATORI and OTHERS]

1st AVOCATORE

The like of this the Senate never heard of.

14 *mummia* a medicinal preparation from the substance of mummies;  
fake mummy was made from baked corpses15 *buffalo* alluding to the cuckold's horns that the 'formal tale' sets  
upon Corvino20 *eat it* i.e. the crop, the legacy; Corvino may overhear the words to  
Corbaccio21 *Mercury* god of eloquence and of trade; also associated with  
trickery and theft22 *French Hercules* Hercules was fabled to have fathered the Celts in  
Gaul while returning from the far west with the oxen of Geryon;  
as the Celtic Hercules he was the symbol of eloquence



2nd AVOCATORE

'Twill come most strange to them, when we report it.

4th AVOCATORE

The gentlewoman has been ever held  
Of unreprovèd name.

3rd AVOCATORE

So, the young man.

4th AVOCATORE

The more unnatural part that of his father.

5

2nd AVOCATORE

More of the husband.

1st AVOCATORE

I not know to give

His act a name, it is so monstrous!

4th AVOCATORE

But the impostor, he is a thing created  
T'exceed example!

1st AVOCATORE

And all after times!

2nd AVOCATORE

I never heard a true voluptuary  
Described, but him.

10

3rd AVOCATORE

Appear yet those were cited?

NOTARIO

All, but the old magnifico, Volpone.

1st AVOCATORE

Why is not he here?

MOSCA

Please your fatherhoods,

Here is his advocate. Himself's, so weak,  
So feeble—

4th AVOCATORE What are you?

BONARIO

His parasite,

15

His knave, his pandar: I beseech the court,  
He may be forced to come, that your grave eyes  
May bear strong witness of his strange impostures.

VOLTORE

Upon my faith, and credit, with your virtues,  
He is not able to endure the air.

20

2nd AVOCATORE

Bring him, however.

3rd AVOCATORE

We will see him.

4th AVOCATORE

Fetch him.

4 *So, the young man* F (Q So has the youth)

9 *example* precedent

9 *after times* i.e. future possibilities

11 *cited* summoned, called as witnesses

## VOLTORE

Your fatherhoods' fit pleasures be obeyed,  
 Be sure, the sight will rather move your pities,  
 Than indignation; may it please the court,  
 In the meantime, he may be heard in me: 25  
 I know this place most void of prejudice,  
 And therefore crave it, since we have no reason  
 To fear our truth should hurt our cause.

3rd AVOCATORE

Speak free.

## VOLTORE

Then know, most honoured fathers, I must now 30  
 Discover, to your strangely abused ears,  
 The most prodigious, and most frontless piece  
 Of solid impudence, and treachery,  
 That ever vicious nature yet brought forth  
 To shame the state of Venice. This lewd woman 35  
 (That wants no artificial looks, or tears,  
 To help the visor, she has now put on)  
 Hath long been known a close adulteress,  
 To that lascivious youth there; not suspected,  
 I say, but known; and taken, in the act, 40  
 With him; and by this man, the easy husband,  
 Pardoned: whose timeless bounty makes him, now,  
 Stand here, the most unhappy, innocent person,  
 That ever man's own goodness made accused.  
 For these, not knowing how to owe a gift 45  
 Of that dear grace, but with their shame; being placed  
 So above all powers of their gratitude,  
 Began to hate the benefit: and, in place  
 Of thanks, devise t'extirp the memory  
 Of such an act. Wherein, I pray your fatherhoods,

22 *fatherhoods* correct form of address, but for Voltore's exploitation  
 of it see Volpone's reaction in V. ii, 33-37

31 *frontless* shameless

35 *wants* lacks

36 *visor* mask

37 *close* secret

41 *timeless* untimely

43 *goodness* F (Q vertue) see Introduction p. xiii

44 *owe* acknowledge (= own), or 'properly possess'

44-45 *gift . . . grace* 'so precious and unmerited a gift (of pardon)'

46 *So . . . gratitude* i.e. in a position of indebtedness beyond the  
 reach of their powers of gratitude

48 *extirp* = extirpate, eradicate

To observe the malice, yea, the rage of creatures 50  
 Discovered in their evils; and what heart  
 Such take, even from their crimes. But that, anon,  
 Will more appear. This gentleman, the father,  
 Hearing of this foul fact, with many others,  
 Which daily struck at his too-tender ears, 55  
 And, grieved in nothing more, than that he could not  
 Preserve himself a parent (his son's ills  
 Growing to that strange flood) at last decreed  
 To disinherit him.

1st AVOCATORE            These be strange turns!

2nd AVOCATORE

The young man's fame was ever fair, and honest. 60

VOLTORE

So much more full of danger is his vice,  
 That can beguile so, under shade of virtue.  
 But as I said, my honoured sires, his father  
 Having this settled purpose, (by what means  
 To him betrayed, we know not) and this day 65  
 Appointed for the deed; that parricide,  
 (I cannot style him better) by confederacy  
 Preparing this his paramour to be there,  
 Entered Volpone's house (who was the man  
 Your fatherhoods must understand, designed 70  
 For the inheritance) there sought his father:  
 But, with what purpose sought he him, my lords?  
 (I tremble to pronounce it, that a son  
 Unto a father, and to such a father  
 Should have so foul, felonious intent) 75  
 It was, to murder him. When, being prevented  
 By his more happy absence, what then did he?  
 Not check his wicked thoughts; no, now new deeds:  
 (Mischief doth ever end, where it begins)  
 An act of horror, fathers! he dragged forth 80  
 The aged gentleman, that had there lain, bed-rid,  
 Three years, and more, out of his innocent couch,  
 Naked, upon the floor, there left him; wounded

51 *heart* hardness of heart; impudent courage

57 *ills* evils

59 *turns* turns of event

67 *confederacy* conspiracy

70 *designed* designated

79 *ever* the reading 'never' has been proposed and followed by some editors, but 'ever' means 'what begins badly ends badly'

His servant in the face; and, with this strumpet,  
 The stale to his forged practice, who was glad 85  
 To be so active, (I shall here desire  
 Your fatherhoods to note but my collections,  
 As most remarkable) thought, at once, to stop  
 His father's ends; discredit his free choice,  
 In the old gentleman; redeem themselves, 90  
 By laying infamy upon this man,  
 To whom, with blushing, they should owe their lives.

1st AVOCATORE

What proofs have you of this?

BONARIO

Most honoured fathers,

I humbly crave, there be no credit given

To this man's mercenary tongue.

2nd AVOCATORE

Forbear.

95

BONARIO

His soul moves in his fee.

3rd AVOCATORE

O, sir.

BONARIO

This fellow,

For six sols more, would plead against his maker.

1st AVOCATORE

You do forget yourself.

VOLTRE

Nay, nay, grave fathers,

Let him have scope: can any man imagine

That he will spare his accuser, that would not

Have spared his parent? 100

1st AVOCATORE

Well, produce your proofs.

CELIA

I would I could forget, I were a creature.

VOLTRE

Signior Corbaccio.

4th AVOCATORE

What is he?

VOLTRE

The father.

2nd AVOCATORE

Has he had an oath?

85 *stale* lure; 'a prostitute of the lowest class employed as a decoy by thieves' (OED)

85 *forged practice* contrived plot

87 *collections* conclusions

89 *ends* purposes, aims

90 *gentleman* i.e. Volpone

92 *owe* acknowledge as due

97 *sols* French coins worth one twentieth of a livre

102 *creature* compare III. vii, 246; 'one of God's creatures'; 'a creature of circumstance'

NOTARIO

Yes.

CORBACCIO

What must I do now?

NOTARIO

Your testimony's craved.

CORBACCIO

Speak to the knave?

105

I'll ha' my mouth, first, stopped with earth; my heart

Abhors his knowledge: I disclaim in him.

1st AVOCATORE

But, for what cause?

CORBACCIO

The mere portent of nature.

He is an utter stranger, to my loins.

BONARIO

Have they made you to this!

CORBACCIO

I will not hear thee,

110

Monster of men, swine, goat, wolf, parricide,

Speak not, thou viper.

BONARIO

Sir, I will sit down,

And rather wish my innocence should suffer,

Than I resist the authority of a father.

VOLTORE

Signior Corvino.

2nd AVOCATORE

This is strange!

1st AVOCATORE

Who's this?

115

NOTARIO

The husband.

4th AVOCATORE

Is he sworn?

NOTARIO

He is.

3rd AVOCATORE

Speak then.

CORVINO

This woman, please your fatherhoods, is a whore,

Of most hot exercise, more than a partridge,

Upon record—

1st AVOCATORE

No more.

CORVINO

Neighs, like a jennet.

NOTARIO

Preserve the honour of the court.

107 *his knowledge* knowledge of him107 *disclaim* deny kinship108 *portent* ominous freak; suggesting unnatural birth and leading to the denial of paternity110 *made* forced, or possibly 'shaped'118 *partridge* described by Pliny as the most concupiscent of creatures (*Nat. Hist.* X. 102)119 *jennet* small Spanish horse

CORVINO

I shall,

120

And modesty of your most reverend ears.  
 And yet, I hope that I may say, these eyes  
 Have seen her glued unto that piece of cedar;  
 That fine well-timbered gallant: and that, here,  
 The letters may be read, thorough the horn,  
 That make the story perfect.

125

MOSCA

Excellent! sir.

CORVINO

There is no shame in this, now, is there?

MOSCA

None.

CORVINO

Or if I said, I hoped that she were onward  
 To her damnation, if there be a hell  
 Greater than whore, and woman; a good Catholic  
 May make the doubt.

130

3rd AVOCATORE

His grief hath made him frantic.

1st AVOCATORE

Remove him, hence.

2nd AVOCATORE

Look to the woman.

*She swoons*

CORVINO

Rare!

Prettily feigned! again!

4th AVOCATORE

Stand from about her.

1st AVOCATORE

Give her the air.

3rd AVOCATORE [To MOSCA] What can you say?

MOSCA

My wound,

135

May't please your wisdoms, speaks for me, received  
 In aid of my good patron, when he missed  
 His sought-for father, when that well-taught dame  
 Had her cue given her, to cry out a rape.

BONARIO

O, most laid impudence! Fathers—

124 *well-timbered* well-built124 *here* Corvino holds his forked fingers to his forehead to give himself cuckold's horns125 *letters* . . . *horn* punning on 'horn-book', a primer (so-called because protected by translucent horn) 126 *perfect* complete127 *shame* F (Q harm) 'shame' is the more ironic word128 *onward* well on the way130 *Catholic* F (Q Christian) perhaps when Jonson was a Catholic he preferred to assign this heretical sentiment less specifically; but perhaps the F reading is to fit the Venetian scene139 *laid* plotted

- 3rd AVOCATORE Sir, be silent,  
You had your hearing free, so must they theirs. 140
- 2nd AVOCATORE  
I do begin to doubt th'imposture here.
- 4th AVOCATORE  
This woman, has too many moods.
- VOLTORE Grave fathers,  
She is a creature, of a most professed,  
And prostituted lewdness.
- CORVINO Most impetuous!  
Unsatisfied, grave fathers!
- VOLTORE May her feignings 145  
Not take your wisdoms: but this day, she baited  
A stranger, a grave knight, with her loose eyes,  
And more lascivious kisses. This man saw 'em  
Together, on the water, in a gondola.
- MOSCA Here is the lady herself, that saw 'em too, 150  
Without; who, then, had in the open streets  
Pursued them, but for saving her knight's honour.
- 1st AVOCATORE  
Produce that lady.
- 2nd AVOCATORE Let her come. [Exit MOSCA]
- 4th AVOCATORE These things  
They strike, with wonder!
- 3rd AVOCATORE I am turned a stone!

### Act IV, Scene vi

[Enter MOSCA with LADY WOULD-BE]

MOSCA

Be resolute, madam.

LADY WOULD-BE Ay, this same is she.

Out, thou chameleon harlot: now, thine eyes  
Vie tears with the hyaena: dar'st thou look

140 *free* i.e. from interruption

146 *baited* enticed

151 *Without* outside

2 *chameleon* its colour changes made it a symbol of fraud and treachery; Lady Would-be alludes to the inconstant appearance of her quarry

3 *hyaena* another symbol of treachery because it attracted its victims by its quasi-human cry (but not by its tears)

Upon my wrongèd face? I cry your pardons.

I fear, I have, forgettingly, transgressed

Against the dignity of the court—

2nd AVOCATORE

No, madam.

LADY WOULD-BE

And been exorbitant—

4th AVOCATORE

You have not, lady.

These proofs are strong.

LADY WOULD-BE

Surely, I had no purpose,

To scandalize your honours, or my sex's.

3rd AVOCATORE

We do believe it.

LADY WOULD-BE

Surely, you may believe it.

2nd AVOCATORE

Madam, we do.

LADY WOULD-BE

Indeed, you may; my breeding

Is not so coarse—

4th AVOCATORE

We know it.

LADY WOULD-BE

To offend

With pertinacy—

3rd AVOCATORE

Lady.

LADY WOULD-BE

Such a presence:

No, surely.

1st AVOCATORE We well think it.

LADY WOULD-BE

You may think it.

1st AVOCATORE

Let her o'ercome. [*To BONARIO*] What witnesses have you,

To make good your report?

BONARIO

Our consciences—

CELIA

And heaven, that never fails the innocent.

4th AVOCATORE

These are no testimonies.

BONARIO

Not in your courts,

Where multitude, and clamour, overcomes.

1st AVOCATORE

Nay, then you do wax insolent.

7 *exorbitant* beyond bounds, outrageous

13 *pertinacy* FQ (eds. pertinency); old form of 'pertinacity'; but Lady Would-be apparently intends 'impertinacy', an erroneous form of 'impertinence'

15 *o'ercome* prevail, have the last word

19 *multitude* numbers (not necessarily a crowd)



VOLTORE

Here, here,

20

*VOLPONE is brought in, as impotent*

The testimony comes, that will convince,  
 And put to utter dumbness their bold tongues.  
 See here, grave fathers, here's the ravisher,  
 The rider on men's wives, the great impostor,  
 The grand voluptuary! do you not think,  
 These limbs should affect venery? or these eyes  
 Covet a concubine? pray you, mark these hands.  
 Are they not fit to stroke a lady's breasts?  
 Perhaps, he doth dissemble?

25

BONARIO

So he does.

VOLTORE

Would you ha'him tortured?

BONARIO

I would have him proved.

30

VOLTORE

Best try him, then, with goads, or burning irons;  
 Put him to the strappado: I have heard,  
 The rack hath cured the gout, faith, give it him,  
 And help him of a malady, be courteous.  
 I'll undertake, before these honoured fathers,  
 He shall have, yet, as many left diseases,  
 As she has known adulterers, or thou strumpets.  
 O, my most equal hearers, if these deeds,  
 Acts, of this bold, and most exorbitant strain,  
 May pass with sufferance, what one citizen,  
 But owes the forfeit of his life, yea fame,  
 To him that dares traduce him? which of you  
 Are safe, my honoured fathers? I would ask,

35

40

20 s.d. *impotent* totally disabled; Lady Would-be may kiss Volpone at this point (see V. ii, 97), or when he is borne out

26 *affect venery* enjoy sexual pleasure; or 'affect' may = 'effect'

30 *proved* put to the proof, tested

32 *strappado* a form of torture; the victim is hoisted by a rope binding his wrists behind his back, then dropped with a jerk; Coryat reports the practice in Venice (see p. 164

33 *rack . . . gout* a common sentiment (e.g. Marston, *Malcontent* III. i, 70)

34 *help* relieve

38 *equal* just

39 *exorbitant strain* outrageous nature

40-42 *what . . . traduce him* 'what single citizen would there be whose life, and indeed reputation, would not be forfeitable to any who had the impudence to slander him?'

With leave of your grave fatherhoods, if their plot  
 Have any face, or colour like to truth? 45  
 Or if, unto the dullest nostril, here,  
 It smell not rank, and most abhorred slander?  
 I crave your care of this good gentleman,  
 Whose life is much endangered, by their fable;  
 And, as for them, I will conclude with this, 50  
 That vicious persons when they are hot, and fleshed  
 In impious acts, their constancy abounds:  
 Damned deeds are done with greatest confidence.

1st AVOCATORE

Take 'em to custody, and sever them.

[CELIA and BONARIO taken out]

2nd AVOCATORE

'Tis pity, two such prodigies should live. 55

1st AVOCATORE

Let the old gentleman be returned, with care:

I'm sorry, our credulity wronged him. [VOLPONE borne off]

4th AVOCATORE

These are two creatures!

3rd AVOCATORE

I have an earthquake in me!

2nd AVOCATORE

Their shame, even in their cradles, fled their faces.

4th AVOCATORE

You've done a worthy service to the state, sir, 60  
 In their discovery.

1st AVOCATORE

You shall hear, ere night,  
 What punishment the court decrees upon 'em.

VOLTORE

We thank your fatherhoods.

[Exeunt AVOCATORI, NOTARIO, OFFICERS]

How like you it?

MOSCA

Rare.

I'd ha' your tongue, sir, tipped with gold, for this;  
 I'd ha' you be the heir to the whole city; 65  
 The earth I'd have want men, ere you want living:  
 They're bound to erect your statue, in St. Mark's.

49 *fable* falsehood, or plot

51 *fleshed* inured

52 *constancy* resolution; recalling Juvenal, *Satires* XIII. 237-240

54 *sever* them keep them apart

55 *prodigies* monsters, unnatural creatures (compare 'portent',  
 IV. v, 108)

66 *want living* lack a livelihood

Signior Corvino, I would have you go,  
And show yourself, that you have conquered.

CORVINO Yes.

MOSCA

It was much better, that you should profess  
Yourself a cuckold, thus; than that the other  
Should have been proved. 70

CORVINO Nay, I considered that:

Now, it is her fault—

MOSCA Then, it had been yours.

CORVINO

True, I do doubt this advocate, still.

MOSCA I'faith,

You need not, I dare ease you of that care. 75

CORVINO

I trust thee, Mosca.

MOSCA As your own soul, sir.

CORBACCIO Mosca!

MOSCA

Now for your business, sir.

CORBACCIO How? ha'you business?

MOSCA

Yes, yours, sir.

CORBACCIO O, none else?

MOSCA None else, not I.

CORBACCIO

Be careful then.

MOSCA Rest you, with both your eyes, sir.

CORBACCIO

Dispatch it—

MOSCA Instantly.

CORBACCIO And look, that all, 80

Whatever, be put in, jewels, plate, monies,

Household stuff, bedding, curtains.

MOSCA Curtain-rings, sir,

Only, the advocate's fee must be deducted.

CORBACCIO

I'll pay him now: you'll be too prodigal.

MOSCA

Sir, I must tender it.

71 *the other* i.e. the procuration of his wife for Volpone

79 *Rest . . . eyes* 'relax completely'

81 *put in* i.e. in the inventory of the inheritance

85 *tender it* give it him

CORBACCIO

Two chequeens is well?

85

MOSCA

No, six, sir.

CORBACCIO 'Tis too much.

MOSCA

He talked a great while,

You must consider that, sir.

CORBACCIO

Well, there's three—

MOSCA I'll give it him.

CORBACCIO

Do so, and there's for thee.

[Exit CORBACCIO]

MOSCA

Bountiful bones! What horrid strange offence

Did he commit 'gainst nature, in his youth,

Worthy his age? you see, sir, how I work

Unto your ends; take you no notice.

90

VOLTORE

No,

I'll leave you.

MOSCA

All is yours; [Exit VOLTORE] the devil, and all:

Good advocate.—Madame, I'll bring you home.

LADY WOULD-BE

No, I'll go see your patron.

MOSCA

That you shall not:

95

I'll tell you, why. My purpose is, to urge

My patron to reform his will; and, for

The zeal you've shown today, whereas before

You were but third, or fourth, you shall be now

Put in the first: which would appear as begged,

If you were present. Therefore—

100

LADY WOULD-BE

You shall sway me.

[Exeunt MOSCA, LADY WOULD-BE]

89 *Bountiful bones!* apt to the meanness and leanness of Corbaccio91 *Worthy . . . age* 'deserving an old age like this'92 *take . . . notice* 'ignore me'; perhaps Lady Would-be is watching97 *reform* recast101 *sway* rule

## Act V, Scene i

[VOLPONE's House]

[Enter] VOLPONE

VOLPONE

Well, I am here; and all this brunt is past:  
 I ne'er was in dislike with my disguise,  
 Till this fled moment; here, 'twas good, in private,  
 But, in your public—*Cavè*, whilst I breathe. [*Gets up*]  
 'Fore God, my left leg 'gan to have the cramp; 5  
 And I apprehended, straight, some power had struck me  
 With a dead palsy: well, I must be merry,  
 And shake it off. A many of these fears  
 Would put me into some villainous disease,  
 Should they come thick upon me: I'll prevent 'em. 10  
 Give me a bowl of lusty wine, to fright  
 This humour from my heart. (*He drinks*) Hum, hum, hum!  
 'Tis almost gone, already: I shall conquer.  
 Any device, now, of rare, ingenious knavery,  
 That would possess me with a violent laughter, 15  
 Would make me up, again! (*Drinks again*) So, so, so, so.  
 This heat is life; 'tis blood, by this time: Mosca!

## Act V, Scene ii

[Enter MOSCA]

MOSCA

How now, sir? does the day look clear again?  
 Are we recovered? and wrought out of error,

s.d. *Enter Volpone* Volpone may be carried in, discovered on his litter,  
 or be back in his bed

1 *brunt* shock, crisis

3 *fled* past

4 *Cavè* (Latin) beware; Volpone may ask the audience to keep a  
 look-out while he relaxes, or he may address the warning to  
 himself

6 *apprehended* F (Q apprehended) felt

6 *straight* immediately

8 *many* used as a noun (compare 'a great many')

17 *This heat is life* Volpone identifies the response of his blood to  
 wine with the processes by which the body's vital heat is  
 generated

2-3 *wrought . . . way* Mosca talks with mock piety (see, e.g., *James*  
 V. 20)



And take upon thee, as thou wert mine heir;  
 Show 'em a will: open that chest, and reach  
 Forth one of those, that has the blanks. I'll straight  
 Put in thy name.

70

MOSCA It will be rare, sir.

VOLPONE Ay,

When they e'en gape, and find themselves deluded—

MOSCA

Yes.

VOLPONE And thou use them scurvily. Dispatch,

75

Get on thy gown.

MOSCA But, what, sir, if they ask

After the body?

VOLPONE Say, it was corrupted.

MOSCA

I'll say it stunk, sir; and was fain t'have it

Coffined up instantly, and sent away.

VOLPONE

Anything, what thou wilt. Hold, here's my will.

80

Get thee a cap, a count-book, pen and ink,

Papers afore thee; sit, as thou wert taking

An inventory of parcels: I'll get up,

Behind the curtain, on a stool, and hearken;

85

Sometime, peep over; see, how they do look;

With what degrees, their blood doth leave their faces!

O, 'twill afford me a rare meal of laughter.

MOSCA

Your advocate will turn stark dull, upon it.

VOLPONE

It will take off his oratory's edge.

MOSCA

But your *clarissimo*, old round-back, he

90

Will crump you, like a hog-louse, with the touch.

VOLPONE

And what Corvino?

MOSCA

O, sir, look for him,

70 *take upon thee* assume the part

72 *has* i.e. have

72 *blanks* spaces for the legatee's names

74 *e'en* just, doing nothing else but

78 *fain* i.e. 'I was fain (obliged)'

81 *count-book* account book

83 *parcels* lots, items

88 *dull* insensible; but Volpone replies to the sense 'blunt'

90 *clarissimo* a Venetian grandee

91 *crump* . . . *louse* 'curl up like a wood-louse'; 'you' is ethic dative

Tomorrow morning, with a rope, and a dagger,  
To visit all the streets; he must run mad.  
My lady too, that came into the court,  
To bear false witness, for your worship—

95

VOLPONE Yes,  
And kissed me 'fore the fathers; when my face  
Flowed all with oils—

MOSCA And sweat, sir. Why, your gold  
Is such another medicine, it dries up  
All those offensive savours! It transforms  
The most deformed, and restores 'em lovely,  
As 'twere the strange poetical girdle. Jove  
Could not invent, t' himself, a shroud more subtle,  
To pass Acrisius' guards. It is the thing  
Makes all the world her grace, her youth, her beauty.

100

105

VOLPONE  
I think, she loves me.

MOSCA Who? the lady, sir?  
She's jealous of you.

VOLPONE Do'st thou say so? [*Knocking without*]

MOSCA Hark,  
There's some already.

VOLPONE Look.

MOSCA It is the vulture:  
He has the quickest scent.

VOLPONE I'll to my place, [*Conceals himself*]  
Thou, to thy posture.

MOSCA I am set.

VOLPONE But, Mosca,  
Play the artificer now, torture 'em, rarely.

110

93 *rope . . . dagger* stock properties of suicidal or homicidal madness induced by despair; compare Hieronimo's madness (once played by Jonson) in *The Spanish Tragedy* IV. iv

97 *kissed me* see IV. vi, 20 s.d. note

98-105 *your gold . . . her beauty* imitates Lucian, *Gallus* 722

102 *poetical girdle* the Folio adds the explanation 'Cestus' after 'Jove'; it was possibly meant as a correction to replace 'girdle'; Cestus, the girdle of Venus described by Homer (*Iliad* XIV. 214-216), could transfigure ugliness and awaken passion even in old age

104 *Acrisius* the father of Danaë; he shut her in a tower of brass but Jove reached her in a shower of gold

106 *the lady* presumably Lady Would-be, but some have supposed Celia

110 *posture* pose, act

111 *Play the artificer* 'do a craftsman's job', with pun on the sense 'trickster'



## Act V, Scene iii

[Enter VOLTORE]

VOLTORE

How now, my Mosca?

MOSCA

Turkey carpets, nine—

VOLTORE

Taking an inventory? that is well.

MOSCA

Two suits of bedding, tissue—

VOLTORE

Where's the will?

Let me read that, the while.

[Enter CORBACCIO carried in a chair]

CORBACCIO

So, set me down:

And get you home.

[Exeunt PORTERS]

VOLTORE

Is he come, now, to trouble us?

5

MOSCA Of cloth of gold, two more—

CORBACCIO

Is it done, Mosca?

MOSCA

Of several velvets, eight—

VOLTORE

I like his care.

CORBACCIO

Dost thou not hear?

[Enter CORVINO]

CORVINO

Ha! is the hour come, Mosca?

VOLPONE *peeps from behind a traverse*

VOLPONE [Aside]

Ay, now they muster.

CORVINO

What does the advocate here?

Or this Corbaccio?

CORBACCIO

What do these here?

[Enter LADY WOULD-BE]

1 *Turkey carpets* then used as table and wall drapery3 *tissue* cloth woven with gold or silver7 *velvets* ed. (FQ vellets); velvet hangings (several = separate)8 s.d. *traverse* see Introduction p. xxx

- LADY WOULD-BE Mosca! 10  
 Is his thread spun?
- MOSCA Eight chests of linen—
- VOLPONE [*Aside*] O,  
 My fine dame Would-be, too!
- CORVINO Mosca, the will,  
 That I may show it these, and rid 'em hence.
- MOSCA  
 Six chests of diaper, four of damask—There  
 [*Gives them the will*]
- CORBACCIO  
 Is that the will?
- MOSCA Down-beds, and bolsters—
- VOLPONE [*Aside*] Rare! 15  
 Be busy still. Now, they begin to flutter:  
 They never think of me. Look, see, see, see!  
 How their swift eyes run over the long deed,  
 Unto the name, and to the legacies,  
 What is bequeathed them, there—
- MOSCA Ten suits of hangings— 20
- VOLPONE [*Aside*]  
 Ay, i'their garters, Mosca. Now, their hopes  
 Are at the gasp.
- VOLTRE Mosca the heir!
- CORBACCIO What's that?
- VOLPONE [*Aside*]  
 My advocate is dumb, look to my merchant,  
 He has heard of some strange storm, a ship is lost,  
 He faints: my lady will swoon. Old glazen-eyes, 25  
 He hath not reached his despair, yet.
- CORBACCIO All these  
 Are out of hope, I am sure the man.
- CORVINO But, Mosca—
- 11 *thread* of the Three Fates, Clothos spun the thread of life,  
 Lachesis measured it, and Atropos cut it; but the phrase was a  
 popular pomposity (see 2 *Henry VI* IV. ii, 31, where one of Cade's  
 men uses it)
- 14 *diaper* fabric with diamond-like pattern
- 20 *suits of hangings* sets for four-poster bed (which may also be  
 meant by 'suits of bedding' in line 3)
- 21 *garters* Volpone puns on the popular jibe 'Hang yourself in your  
 own garters' (see 1 *Henry IV* II. ii, 46)
- 22 *gasp* last gasp
- 25 *glazen-eyes* Corbaccio wears spectacles (see line 63, below)

MOSCA

Two cabinets—

CORVINO

Is this in earnest?

MOSCA

One

Of ebony—

CORVINO

Or, do you but delude me?

MOSCA

The other, mother of pearl—I am very busy.

30

Good faith, it is a fortune thrown upon me—

Item, one salt of agate—not my seeking.

LADY WOULD-BE

Do you hear, sir?

MOSCA

A perfumed box—'pray you forbear,

You see I am troubled—made of an onyx—

LADY WOULD-BE

How!

MOSCA

Tomorrow, or next day, I shall be at leisure,

35

To talk with you all.

CORVINO

Is this my large hope's issue?

LADY WOULD-BE

Sir, I must have a fairer answer.

MOSCA

Madam!

Marry, and shall: pray you, fairly quit my house.

Nay, raise no tempest with your looks; but, hark you:

Remember, what your ladyship offered me,

40

To put you in, an heir; go to, think on't.

And what you said, e'en your best madams did

For maintenance, and why not you? enough.

Go home, and use the poor Sir Pol, your knight, well;

For fear I tell some riddles: go, be melancholic.

45

[Exit LADY WOULD-BE]

VOLPONE [Aside]

O, my fine devil!

CORVINO

Mosca, pray you a word.

MOSCA

Lord! will not you take your dispatch hence, yet?

Methinks, of all, you should have been th'example.

32 *salt* salt-cellar34 *troubled* busy, being put to some trouble; or perhaps 'vexed'38 *fairly* probably 'well and truly', completely40-43 *Remember . . . you* these lines supply the plot initiated at

IV. vi, 96-101

45 *riddles* mysteries, secrets48 *example* i.e. in leading the way when 'dispatched'

Why should you stay, here? with what thought? what promise?

Hear you, do not you know, I know you an ass? 50

And that you would, most fain, have been a wittol,

If fortune would have let you? that you are

A declared cuckold, on good terms? this pearl,

You'll say, was yours? right: this diamant?

I'll not deny't, but thank you. Much here, else? 55

It may be so. Why, think that these good works

May help to hide your bad: I'll not betray you,

Although you be but extraordinary,

And have it only in title, if sufficeth.

Go home, be melancholic too, or mad. [Exit CORVINO] 60

VOLPONE [Aside]

Rare, Mosca! how this villainy becomes him!

VOLTORE

Certain, he doth delude all these, for me.

CORBACCIO

Mosca, the heir?

VOLPONE [Aside] O, his four eyes have found it!

CORBACCIO

I'm cozened, cheated, by a parasite slave;

Harlot thou'st gulled me.

MOSCA Yes, sir. Stop your mouth, 65

Or I shall draw the only tooth, is left.

Are not you he, that filthy covetous wretch,

With the three legs, that here, in hope of prey,

Have, any time this three year, snuffed about,

With your most grov'ling nose; and would have hired 70

Me to the poisoning of my patron? sir?

Are not you he, that have, today, in court,

Professed the disinheriting of your son?

Perjured yourself? Go home, and die, and stink;

If you but croak a syllable, all comes out: 75

Away and call your porters, go, go, stink. [Exit CORBACCIO]

VOLPONE [Aside]

Excellent varlet!

51 *wittol* conniving cuckold

53 *on good terms* i.e. outspokenly so, fair and square

58 *extraordinary* in title only (as Mosca explains); used of offices held extra to the establishment

65 *Harlot* base-born fellow

68 *three legs* i.e. with his stick; in the riddle of the Sphinx, the child goes upon four legs, the man on two, and the old man on three

VOLTORE                    Now, my faithful Mosca,

I find thy constancy—

MOSCA                    Sir?

VOLTORE                    Sincere.

MOSCA                    A table

Of porphyry—I mar'l, you'll be thus troublesome.

VOLTORE

Nay, leave off now, they are gone.

MOSCA                    Why, who are you? 80

What, who did send for you? O, cry your mercy,

Reverend sir! good faith, I am grieved for you,

That any chance of mine should thus defeat

Your, I must needs say, most deserving travails:

But, I protest, sir, it was cast upon me, 85

And I could, almost, wish to be without it,

But that the will o'the dead, must be observed.

Marry, my joy is, that you need it not,

You have a gift, sir, thank your education,

Will never let you want, while there are men, 90

And malice, to breed causes. Would I had

But half the like, for all my fortune, sir.

If I have any suits (as I do hope,

Things being so easy, and direct, I shall not)

I will make bold with your obstreperous aid, 95

Conceive me, for your fee, sir. In meantime,

You, that have so much law, I know ha' the conscience,

Not to be covetous of what is mine.

Good sir, I thank you for my plate: 'twill help

To set up a young man. Good faith, you look 100

As you were costive; best go home, and purge, sir.

[Exit VOLTORE]

VOLPONE [Coming out]

Bid him, eat lettuce well: my witty mischief,

Let me embrace thee. O, that I could now

Transform thee to a Venus—Mosca, go,

79 *mar'l* marvel

83 *chance* good fortune

90 *want* be in need

91 *causes* law-suits

95 *obstreperous* vociferous

96 *Conceive . . . fee* 'I shall expect to pay the usual fee, you understand'

99 *plate* i.e. that presented by Voltore (I. iii, 10)

102 *lettuce* a recognised treatment for constipation, and for frenzy

SCENE IV]	VOLPONE	131
	Straight, take my habit of <i>clarissimo</i> ; And walk the streets; be seen, torment 'em more: We must pursue, as well as plot. Who would Have lost this feast?	105
MOSCA	I doubt it will lose them.	
VOLPONE	O, my recovery shall recover all. That I could now but think on some disguise, To meet 'em in: and ask 'em questions. How I would vex 'em still, at every turn!	110
MOSCA	Sir, I can fit you.	
VOLPONE	Canst thou?	
MOSCA	Yes, I know One o' the <i>commendatori</i> , sir, so like you, Him will I straight make drunk, can bring you his habit.	115
VOLPONE	A rare disguise, and answering thy brain! O, I will be a sharp disease unto 'em.	
MOSCA	Sir, you must look for curses—	
VOLPONE	Till they burst; The Fox fares ever best, when he is cursed.	

### Act V, Scene iv

[SIR POLITIC WOULD-BE's House]

[Enter PEREGRINE disguised, and three MERCHANTS]

PEREGRINE	Am I enough disguised?
1st MERCHANT	I warrant you.
PEREGRINE	All my ambition is to fright him, only.

105 *habit of clarissimo* for a description see p. 164

108 *doubt* . . . *them* possibly 'I doubt if it will get rid of them', but Volpone's reply interprets 'I fear it will lose them to us as a source of income'

114 *commendatori* ed. (F Commandatori Q Commandadori) a term for the court officers, sergeants at law

119 *Fox* . . . *cursed* a proverb; the fox is only cursed by the hunter when he gets away

1 *warrant* assure

2nd MERCHANT

If you could ship him away, 'twere excellent.

3rd MERCHANT

To Zant, or to Aleppo?

PEREGRINE

Yes, and ha' his

Adventures put i' the *Book of Voyages*,

And his gulled story registered, for truth?

Well, gentlemen, when I am in, a while,

And that you think us warm in our discourse,

Know your approaches.

1st MERCHANT

Trust it to our care.

[*Exeunt* MERCHANTS][*Enter* WAITING WOMAN]

PEREGRINE

Save you, fair lady. Is Sir Pol within?

WOMAN

I do not know, sir.

PEREGRINE

Pray you, say unto him,

Here is a merchant, upon earnest business,

Desires to speak with him.

WOMAN

I will see, sir.

PEREGRINE

Pray you.

[*Exit* WOMAN]

I see, the family is all female, here.

[*Enter* WAITING WOMAN]

WOMAN

He says, sir, he has weighty affairs of state,

That now require him whole—some other time

You may possess him.

PEREGRINE

Pray you, may again,

If those require him whole, these will exact him,

4 *Zant Zante*, one of the Ionian islands, and a Venetian possession at the time5 *Book of Voyages* Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations* was published in its enlarged form in 1598–1600, but there were other books of voyages too6 *gulled story* 'the story of his gulling'9 *Know . . . approaches* get ready to enter (perhaps nautical jargon)12 *earnest weighty*16 *require . . . whole* require his whole attention17 *possess him* have his company18 *exact him* probably 'force him out', extract him from his study (see *OED*)

5

10

15

Whereof I bring him tidings. [*Exit WOMAN*] What might be  
His grave affair of state, now? how to make  
Bolognian sausages, here, in Venice, sparing  
One o' th' ingredients.

20

[*Enter WAITING WOMAN*]

WOMAN Sir, he says, he knows  
By your word, tidings, that you are no statesman,  
And therefore, wills you stay.

PEREGRINE Sweet, pray you return him,  
I have not read so many proclamations,  
And studied them, for words, as he has done;  
But—Here he deigns to come. [*Exit WOMAN*]

25

[*Enter SIR POLITIC WOULD-BE*]

SIR POLITIC Sir, I must crave  
Your courteous pardon. There hath chanced, today,  
Unkind disaster, 'twixt my lady, and me:  
And I was penning my apology  
To give her satisfaction, as you came, now.

30

PEREGRINE  
Sir, I am grieved, I bring you worse disaster;  
The gentleman, you met at the port, today,  
That told you, he was newly arrived—

SIR POLITIC Ay, was  
A fugitive-punk?

PEREGRINE No, sir, a spy, set on you:  
And, he has made relation to the Senate,  
That you professed to him, to have a plot,  
To sell the state of Venice, to the Turk.

35

SIR POLITIC  
O me!

PEREGRINE For which, warrants are signed by this time,

21 *Bolognian sausages* 'The mortadella of *Bologna* is still famous.  
Sir Thomas Gresham imported it to England from Rotterdam'  
(Herford and Simpson)

21 *sparing* leaving out

23 *tidings* Sir Politic's word is 'intelligence' (II. i, 68)

24 *return him* answer him

35 *punk* prostitute

36 *made relation* Peregrine now uses state language (see II.i, 96)

38 *to the Turk* see IV. i, 130



To apprehend you, and to search your study,  
For papers—

40

SIR POLITIC      Alas, sir. I have none, but notes,  
Drawn out of play-books—

PEREGRINE                      All the better, sir.

SIR POLITIC

And some essays. What shall I do?

PEREGRINE                      Sir, best

Convey yourself into a sugar-chest,  
Or, if you could lie round, a frail were rare:  
And I could send you, aboard.

45

SIR POLITIC                      Sir, I but talked so,  
For discourse sake, merely.                      *They knock without*

PEREGRINE                      Hark, they are there.

SIR POLITIC

I am a wretch, a wretch.

PEREGRINE                      What will you do, sir?

Ha'you ne'er a currant-butt to leap into?  
They'll put you to the rack, you must be sudden.

50

SIR POLITIC

Sir, I have an engine—

3rd MERCHANT [*Off-stage*] Sir Politic Would-be?

2nd MERCHANT [*Off-stage*]

Where is he?

SIR POLITIC      That I have thought upon, before time.

PEREGRINE

What is it?

SIR POLITIC      —I shall ne'er endure the torture.—

Marry, it is, sir, of a tortoise-shell,  
Fitted, for these extremities: 'pray you sir, help me.  
Here, I've a place, sir, to put back my legs,—  
Please you to lay it on, sir—with this cap,  
And my black gloves, I'll lie, sir, like a tortoise,  
Till they are gone.

55

PEREGRINE                      And, call you this an engine?

43 *essays* a literary form that Jonson despised (*Discoveries* 719–729)

44 *Convey* another Politic word (see II. i, 80)

45 *lie round* curl up

45 *frail* rush basket for figs

50 *sudden* quick

51 *engine* device, contrivance

54 *tortoise-shell* a feature of the Venetian market (see p. 164); the tortoise was a symbol of polity

55 *Fitted* F (Q Apted) suited

SIR POLITIC

Mine own device—good sir, bid my wife's women  
To burn my papers.

60

[MERCHANTS] *rush in*

1st MERCHANT                   Where's he hid?

3rd MERCHANT                   We must,

And will, sure, find him.

2nd MERCHANT                   Which is his study?

1st MERCHANT                   What

Are you, sir?

PEREGRINE           I'm a merchant, that came here

To look upon this tortoise.

3rd MERCHANT                   How?

1st MERCHANT                   St. Mark!

What beast is this?

PEREGRINE           It is a fish.

2nd MERCHANT                   Come out, here.

65

PEREGRINE

Nay, you may strike him, sir, and tread upon him:

He'll bear a cart.

1st MERCHANT                   What, to run over him?

PEREGRINE   Yes.

3rd MERCHANT

Let's jump upon him.

2nd MERCHANT                   Can he not go?

PEREGRINE   He creeps, sir.

1st MERCHANT

Let's see him creep. [*Prods him*]

PEREGRINE                   No, good sir, you will hurt him.

2nd MERCHANT

Heart, I'll see him creep; or prick his guts.

70

3rd MERCHANT

Come out, here.

PEREGRINE           Pray you sir. [*To SIR POLITIC*] Creep a little!

1st MERCHANT   Forth!

2nd MERCHANT

Yet further.

60 *device invention* (of own devising)61 s.d. Folio reads *They rush in*.

61 *burn my papers* Peregrine must tell the woman to do this as the  
merchants rush in and look round; the 'funeral' alluded to in  
line 76 may be visible to the audience from the gallery or an  
inner room

PEREGRINE Good sir! [*To SIR POLITIC*] Creep!

2nd MERCHANT We'll see his legs.

*They pull off the shell and discover him*

3rd MERCHANT

God's so—, he has garters!

1st MERCHANT Ay, and gloves!

2nd MERCHANT Is this

Your fearful tortoise?

PEREGRINE [*Throwing off his disguise*] Now, Sir Pol, we are even;

For your next project, I shall be prepared:

I am sorry for the funeral of your notes, sir.

75

1st MERCHANT

'Twere a rare motion, to be seen in Fleet Street!

2nd MERCHANT

Ay, i'the term.

1st MERCHANT Or Smithfield, in the fair.

3rd MERCHANT

Methinks, 'tis but a melancholic sight!

PEREGRINE

Farewell, most politic tortoise.

[*Exeunt PEREGRINE, MERCHANTS*]

[*Enter WAITING WOMAN*]

SIR POLITIC Where's my lady?

80

Knows she of this?

WOMAN I know not, sir.

SIR POLITIC Enquire. [*Exit WOMAN*]

O, I shall be the fable of all feasts;

The freight of the *gazetti*; ship-boys' tale;

And, which is worst, even talk for ordinaries.

[*Enter WAITING WOMAN*]

WOMAN

My lady's come most melancholic, home,  
And says, sir, she will straight to sea, for physic.

85

73 *God's so*— see II. vi, 59n.

77 *motion* puppet-show

78 *term* the law term, when the lawyers of the Inns of Court were in residence and their clients in town

78 *Smithfield* site of Bartholomew Fair; Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* features a puppet-show

83 *freight* . . . *gazetti* i.e. carried by the news-sheets

84 *ordinary* tavern (see II. i, 76n.)

86 *physic* medical treatment, recuperation

SIR POLITIC

And I, to shun, this place, and clime for ever;  
 Creeping, with house, on back: and think it well,  
 To shrink my poor head, in my politic shell.

## Act V, Scene v

[VOLPONE's House]

[Enter] VOLPONE, MOSCA; *the first, in the habit of a  
 Commendatore: the other, of a Clarissimo.*

VOLPONE

Am I then like him?

MOSCA

O, sir, you are he:

No man can sever you.

VOLPONE

Good.

MOSCA

But, what am I?

VOLPONE

'Fore heaven, a brave *clarissimo*, thou becom'st it!

Pity, thou wert not born one.

MOSCA

If I hold

My made one, 'twill be well.

VOLPONE

I'll go, and see

What news, first, at the court. [Exit VOLPONE]

MOSCA

Do so. My Fox

Is out on his hole, and, ere he shall re-enter,

I'll make him languish in his borrowed case,

Except he come to composition, with me:

Androgyno, Castrone, Nano!

[Enter ANDROGYNO, CASTRONE, NANO]

ALL

Here.

MOSCA

Go recreate yourselves, abroad; go, sport. [Exeunt the three]

s.d. *habit* Gifford describes the dress as 'a black stuff gown and a red  
 cap with two gilt buttons in front.'

2 *sever* separate, distinguish

4 *hold* either 'keep up' or 'remain in' the assumed role; Mosca  
 equivocates between modesty and guile

6-7 *Fox . . . hole* alluding to the boys' game, Fox-in-the-Hole;  
 players hop, and strike each other with gloves and light thongs

8 *case* disguise 9 *Except* unless

9 *composition* agreement, compromise

11. *recreate* refresh, amuse 11 *abroad* outside

So, now I have the keys, and am possessed.  
 Since he will, needs, be dead, afore his time,  
 I'll bury him, or gain by him. I'm his heir:  
 And so will keep me, till he share at least.  
 To cozen him of all, were but a cheat  
 Well placed; no man would construe it a sin:  
 Let his sport pay for't, this is called the Fox-trap.

15

[*Exit MOSCA*]

## Act V, Scene vi

[*A Street*][*Enter CORBACCIO and CORVINO*]

CORBACCIO

They say, the court is set.

CORVINO

We must maintain

Our first tale good, for both our reputations.

CORBACCIO

Why? mine's no tale: my son would, there, have killed me.

CORVINO

That's true, I had forgot: mine is, I am sure.

But, for your will, sir.

CORBACCIO

Ay, I'll come upon him,

For that, hereafter, now his patron's dead.

5

[*Enter VOLTONE disguised*]

VOLTONE

Signior Corvino! and Corbaccio! sir,

Much joy unto you.

CORVINO

Of what?

VOLTONE

The sudden good,

Dropped down upon you—

CORBACCIO

Where?

VOLTONE

And none knows how—

From old Voltone, sir.

CORBACCIO

Out, errant knave.

10

VOLTONE

Let not your too much wealth, sir, make you furious.

12 *possessed* in possession (but the word has its other potentials)15 *keep me* remain18 *Let . . . for't* 'Let his amusement compensate his loss', but 'sport'  
 is also apt for the hunting and hunted fox5 *come upon* 'make a demand or claim upon' (*OED*)10 *errant* = arrant (see III. vii, 118n.)

CORBACCIO

Away, thou varlet.

VOLPONE                   Why sir?

CORBACCIO                   Dost thou mock me?

VOLPONE

You mock the world, sir, did you not change wills?

CORBACCIO

Out, harlot.

VOLPONE           O! belike you are the man,

Signior Corvino? Faith, you carry it well; 15

You grow not mad withal: I love your spirit.

You are not over-leavened, with your fortune.

You should ha'some would swell, now, like a wine-fat,

With such an autumn—Did he gi' you all, sir?

CORVINO

Avoid, you rascal.

VOLPONE           Troth, your wife has shown 20

Herself a very woman: but, you are well,

You need not care, you have a good estate,

To bear it out, sir: better by this chance.

Except Corbaccio have a share?

CORBACCIO

Hence, varlet.

VOLPONE

You will not be aknownd, sir: why, 'tis wise. 25

Thus do all gamesters, at all games, dissemble.

No man will seem to win. [*Exeunt CORBACCIO, CORVINO*]

Here, comes my vulture,

Heaving his beak up i'the air, and snuffing.

## Act V, Scene vii

[*Enter VOLTORE to VOLPONE*]

VOLTORE

Outstripped thus, by a parasite? a slave?

13 *mock the world* 'are laughing at everyone'13 *change* exchange17 *over-leavened* puffed up (as with too much yeast)18 *You . . . swell* 'You'd have some swelling . . .'18 *wine-fat* wine-vat19 *autumn* i.e. harvest20 *Avoid* be gone!21 *a very woman* a woman indeed23 *bear it out* carry it off25 *aknownd* acknowledged (to be the heir)



## Act V, Scene viii

[Enter] CORBACCIO, CORVINO, (MOSCA *passant*)

CORBACCIO

See, in our habit! see the impudent varlet!

CORVINO

That I could shoot mine eyes at him, like gun-stones!

VOLPONE

But, is this true, sir, of the parasite?

CORBACCIO

Again, t'afflict us? monster!

VOLPONE

In good faith, sir,

I'm heartily grieved, a beard of your grave length

5

Should be so over-reached. I never brooked

That parasite's hair, methought his nose should cozen:

There still was somewhat, in his look, did promise

The bane of a *clarissimo*.

CORBACCIO

Knave—

VOLPONE

Methinks,

Yet you, that are so traded i'the world,

10

A witty merchant, the fine bird, Corvino,

That have such moral emblems on your name,

Should not have sung your shame; and dropped your cheese:

To let the Fox laugh at your emptiness.

CORVINO

Sirrah, you think, the privilege of the place,

15

And your red saucy cap, that seems, to me,

Nailed to your jolt-head, with those two chequeens,

Can warrant your abuses; come you, hither:

You shall perceive, sir, I dare beat you. Approach.

s.d. MOSCA *passant* i.e. crosses the stage in his role of *clarissimo*

2 *gun-stones* stone cannon-shot

5 *beard . . . length* 'one so old and wise', but probably literal too

9 *bane* ruin, destruction

10 *traded* experienced

12 *moral emblems* Corvino's name recalls the crow that dropped its cheese to sing to the fox; see p. 157

14 *emptiness* i.e. of belly and of head

15 *place* station, rank (as a commendatore)

17 *jolt-head* block-head

17 *chequeens* i.e. the coin-like buttons on his hat (see V. v, s.d. note)

18 *warrant* sanction, protect by official authority



VOLPONE

No haste, sir, I do know your valour, well:  
 Since you durst publish what you are, sir.

20

CORVINO

Tarry,

I'd speak, with you.

VOLPONE

Sir, sir, another time—

CORVINO

Nay, now.

VOLPONE

O God, sir! I were a wise man,  
 Would stand the fury of a distracted cuckold.

*Mosca walks by 'em*

CORBACCIO

What! come again?

VOLPONE

Upon 'em, Mosca; save me!

25

CORBACCIO

The air's infected, where he breathes.

CORVINO

Let's fly him.

VOLPONE

Excellent basilisk! turn upon the vulture.

### Act V, Scene ix

[Enter VOLTORE]

VOLTORE

Well, flesh-fly, it is summer with you, now;  
 Your winter will come on.

MOSCA

Good advocate,

Pray thee, not rail, nor threaten out of place, thus;  
 Thou'lt make a solecism, as madam says.

Get you a biggin more: your brain breaks loose.

5

VOLTORE

Well, sir.

VOLPONE

Would you ha' me beat the insolent slave?  
 Throw dirt, upon his first good clothes?

VOLTORE

This same

Is, doubtless, some familiar!

VOLPONE

Sir, the court

24 *stand* withstand

27 *basilisk* or cockatrice, a fabulous reptile hatched by a serpent from  
 a cock's egg and capable of killing by its glance

1 *flesh-fly* a blow-fly, the meaning of 'Mosca'

4 *solecism* see IV. ii, 43 and note

5 *biggin* lawyer's cap or coif

8 *familiar* i.e. 'some fellow of the same household'

In troth, stays for you. I am mad, a mule,  
 That never read Justinian, should get up, 10  
 And ride an advocate. Had you no quirk,  
 To avoid gullage, sir, by such a creature?  
 I hope you do but jest; he has not done't:  
 This's but confederacy, to blind the rest.  
 You are the heir?

VOLTORE                    A strange, officious, 15  
 Troublesome knave! thou dost torment me.

VOLPONE                    I know—  
 It cannot be, sir, that you should be cozened;  
 'Tis not within the wit of man, to do it:  
 You are so wise, so prudent—and, 'tis fit,  
 That wealth, and wisdom still, should go together. 20

### Act V, Scene x

#### [*The Scrutineo*]

[*Enter*] Four AVOCATORI, NOTARIO, COMMENDATORI, BONARIO,  
 CELIA, CORBACCIO, CORVINO.

1st AVOCATORE

Are all the parties, here?

NOTARIO

All, but the advocate.

2nd AVOCATORE

And, here he comes.

[*Enter* VOLTORE, *with* VOLPONE *disguised*]

1st AVOCATORE

Then bring 'em forth to sentence.

VOLTORE

O, my most honoured fathers, let your mercy

Once win upon your justice, to forgive—

I am distracted—

9 *mad* furious (that)

9 *mule* mules were customarily ridden by lawyers

10 *Justinian* i.e. the *Corpus Juris Civilis*, the Roman code of law  
 compiled under the direction of Justinian I

11 *quirk* trick

12 *gullage* being gulled

14 *confederacy* i.e. between Mosca and Voltore

2 s.p. 1st AVOCATORE ed. (F AVO. Q AVOC.); it is possible that F  
 intends AVOCATORI, and that they speak together; likewise the  
 ascription at line 20 below

4 *win upon* overcome

- VOLPONE [*Aside*] What will he do, now?  
 VOLTORE O, 5  
 I know not which t'address myself to, first,  
 Whether your fatherhoods, or these innocents—
- CORVINO [*Aside*]  
 Will he betray himself?  
 VOLTORE Whom, equally,  
 I have abused, out of most covetous ends—  
 CORVINO [*To CORBACCIO*]  
 The man is mad!  
 CORBACCIO What's that?  
 CORVINO He is possessed. 10  
 VOLTORE  
 For which, now struck in conscience, here I prostrate  
 Myself, at your offended feet, for pardon.  
 1st and 2nd AVOCATORI  
 Arise!
- CELIA O heaven, how just thou art?  
 VOLPONE [*Aside*] I'm caught  
 I'mine own noose—  
 CORVINO [*To CORBACCIO*] Be constant, sir, nought now  
 Can help, but impudence.  
 1st AVOCATORE Speak forward.  
 COMMENDATORE Silence! 15  
 VOLTORE  
 It is not passion in me, reverend fathers,  
 But only conscience, conscience, my good sires,  
 That makes me, now, tell truth. That parasite,  
 That knave hath been the instrument of all.  
 2nd AVOCATORE  
 Where is that knave? fetch him!
- VOLPONE I go. [*Exit VOLPONE*]  
 CORVINO Grave fathers, 20  
 This man's distracted; he confessed it, now:  
 For, hoping to be old Volpone's heir,  
 Who now is dead—  
 3rd AVOCATORE How?
- 9 *ends* purposes, motives  
 10 *possessed* i.e. of a devil  
 14 *constant* firm, consistent  
 15 *impudence* unblushing effrontery  
 16 *passion* frenzy  
 20 s.p. 2nd AVOCATORE ed. (F AVO. Q AVOC.) see note line 2 above  
 21 *now* just now (line 5 above)

2nd AVOCATORE

Is Volpone dead?

CORVINO

Dead since, grave fathers—

BONARIO

O, sure vengeance!

1st AVOCATORE

Stay,

Then, he was no deceiver?

VOLTRE

O no, none:

25

The parasite, grave fathers—

CORVINO

He does speak,

Out of mere envy, 'cause the servant's made

The thing, he gaped for; please your fatherhoods,

This is the truth: though, I'll not justify

The other, but he may be some-deal faulty.

30

VOLTRE

Ay, to your hopes, as well as mine, Corvino:

But I'll use modesty. Pleaseth your wisdoms

To view these certain notes, and but confer them;

[Gives them papers]

As I hope favour, they shall speak clear truth.

CORVINO

The devil has entered him!

BONARIO

Or bides in you.

35

4th AVOCATORE

We have done ill, by a public officer

To send for him, if he be heir.

2nd AVOCATORE

For whom?

4th AVOCATORE

Him, that they call the parasite.

3rd AVOCATORE

'Tis true;

He is a man, of great estate, now left.

4th AVOCATORE

Go you, and learn his name; and say, the court

40

27 *made* achieved, grabbed28 *gaped for* hungered after; a noticeable word in *Volpone*—see  
I. ii, 97n., I. iv, 42, V. ii, 7430 *but he may* the *but* after the denial expresses Corvino's conviction that  
Mosca too is at fault 30 *some-deal* F (Q somewhere)32 *modesty* moderation33 *certain* 'particular' or perhaps 'reliable'33 *confer* either 'compare' or 'consult together about'36 *public officer* describing the status of Volpone as commendatore  
(line 20); now the Notario is sent (as indicated at V. xii, 13); F  
and Q have a comma after 'officer', which might add to the  
bewilderment expressed by the 2nd Avocatore's question

CELIA

How ready is heaven to those, that pray!

1st AVOCATORE

But, that

5

Volpone would have ravished her, he holds

Utterly false; knowing his impotence.

CORVINO

Grave fathers, he is possessed; again, I say,

Possessed: nay, if there be possession,

And obsession, he has both.

3rd AVOCATORE

Here comes our officer.

10

[Enter VOLPONE, disguised]

VOLPONE

The parasite will straight be here, grave fathers.

4th AVOCATORE

You might invent some other name, sir varlet.

3rd AVOCATORE

Did not the notary meet him?

VOLPONE

Not that I know.

4th AVOCATORE

His coming will clear all.

2nd AVOCATORE

Yet it is misty.

VOLTRE

May't please your fatherhoods—

VOLPONE *whispers [to] the Advocate*

VOLPONE

Sir, the parasite

15

Willed me to tell you, that his master lives;

That you are still the man; your hopes, the same;

And this was, only a jest—

VOLTRE

How?

VOLPONE

Sir, to try

If you were firm, and how you stood affected.

VOLTRE

Art sure he lives?

VOLPONE

Do I live, sir?

VOLTRE

O me!

20

I was too violent.

10 *obsession* 'actuation by the devil or an evil spirit from without' (OED)      12 *invent* find

12 *varlet* menial or knave (here used to slight the commendatore)

19 *how* . . . *affected* 'which way you were inclined', 'how you would feel and act'

20 *Do* . . . *sir?* Volpone evidently discloses his identity to Voltore, perhaps by showing his red hair, or a signet ring

VOLPONE

Sir, you may redeem it—

They said, you were possessed; fall down, and seem so:

I'll help to make it good.

VOLTRE *falls*

God bless the man!

[*Aside*] Stop your wind hard, and swell—See, see, see, see!

He vomits crooked pins! his eyes are set,

Like a dead hare's, hung in a poulter's shop!

His mouth's running away! do you see, signior?

Now, 'tis in his belly.

25

CORVINO

Ay, the devil!

VOLPONE

Now, in his throat.

CORVINO

Ay, I perceive it plain.

VOLPONE

'Twill out, 'twill out; stand clear. See, where it flies!

In shape of a blue toad, with a bat's wings!

Do not you see it, sir?

30

CORBACCIO

What? I think I do.

CORVINO

'Tis too manifest.

VOLPONE

Look! he comes t'himself!

VOLTRE

Where am I?

VOLPONE

Take good heart, the worst is past, sir.

You are dispossessed.

1st AVOCATORE

What accident is this?

35

2nd AVOCATORE

Sudden, and full of wonder!

3rd AVOCATORE

If he were

Possessed, as it appears, all this is nothing.

CORVINO

He has been, often, subject to these fits.

1st AVOCATORE

Show him that writing, do you know it, sir?

VOLPONE [*Aside to VOLTRE*]

Deny it, sir, forswear it, know it not.

40

24 *Stop your wind* hold your breath25–31 *crooked pins . . . bat's wings* imitated from details in accounts of contemporary impostures (see p. 165)26 *poulter's* poulterers27 *running away* twisting from one side to the other (see p. 166)

VOLTORE

Yes, I do know it well, it is my hand:

But all, that it contains, is false.

BONARIO

O practice!

2nd AVOCATORE

What maze is this!

1st AVOCATORE

Is he not guilty, then,

Whom you, there, name the parasite?

VOLTORE

Grave fathers,

No more than, his good patron, old Volpone.

45

4th AVOCATORE

Why, he is dead?

VOLTORE

O no, my honoured fathers.

He lives—

1st AVOCATORE How! lives?

VOLTORE

Lives.

2nd AVOCATORE

This is subtler yet!

3rd AVOCATORE

You said he was dead!

VOLTORE

Never.

3rd AVOCATORE [*To CORVINO*] You said so!

CORVINO

I heard so.

4th AVOCATORE

Here comes the gentleman, make him way.

[*Enter MOSCA as clarissimo*]

3rd AVOCATORE

A stool!

4th AVOCATORE [*Aside*]

A proper man! and were Volpone dead,

50

A fit match for my daughter.

3rd AVOCATORE

Give him way.

VOLTONE [*Aside to MOSCA*]

Mosca, I was almost lost, the advocate

Had betrayed all; but, now, it is recovered:

All's o'the hinge again—say, I am living.

MOSCA

What busy knave is this! most reverend fathers,

55

I sooner, had attended your grave pleasures,

41 *hand* handwriting47 *subtler* more elusive and bewildering50 *proper* handsome53 *recovered* got back again; covered up again54 *o' the hinge* running smoothly, no longer unhinged (*o' = on*)55 *busy* officious

But that my order, for the funeral  
Of my dear patron did require me—

VOLPONE [*Aside*] Mosca!

MOSCA

Whom I intend to bury, like a gentleman.

VOLPONE [*Aside*]

Aye, quick, and cozen me of all.

2nd AVOCATORE Still stranger!

60

More intricate!

1st AVOCATORE And come about again!

4th AVOCATORE [*Aside*]

It is a match, my daughter is bestowed.

MOSCA [*Aside to VOLPONE*]

Will you give me half?

VOLPONE [*Aside to MOSCA*] First, I'll be hanged.

MOSCA [*Aside to VOLPONE*] I know,

Your voice is good, cry not so loud.

1st AVOCATORE Demand

65

The advocate. Sir, did you not affirm,

Volpone was alive?

VOLPONE Yes, and he is;

This gent' man told me so. [*Aside to MOSCA*] Thou shalt have half.

MOSCA

Whose drunkard is this same? speak some that know him:

I never saw his face. [*Aside to VOLPONE*] I cannot now

Afford it you so cheap.

VOLPONE [*Aside to MOSCA*] No?

70

1st AVOCATORE What say you?

VOLTONE

The officer told me.

VOLPONE I did, grave fathers,

And will maintain, he lives, with mine own life.

And, that this creature told me. [*Aside*] I was born

With all good stars my enemies.

MOSCA Most grave fathers,

75

If such an insolence, as this, must pass

Upon me, I am silent: 'twas not this,

For which you sent, I hope.

2nd AVOCATORE Take him away.

60 *quick* alive

61 *come about* turned round, reversed

64 *cry* shout 64 *Demand* ask

74 *good* propitious 75 *pass* be allowed



VOLPONE [*Aside*]

Mosca!

3rd AVOCATORE

Let him be whipped,—

VOLPONE [*Aside*]

Wilt thou betray me?

Cozen me?

3rd AVOCATORE And taught to bear himself

Toward a person of his rank.

4th AVOCATORE

Away.

[VOLPONE is seized] 80

MOSCA

I humbly thank your fatherhoods.

VOLPONE [*Aside*]

Soft, soft: whipped?

And lose all that I have? if I confess,

It cannot be much more.

4th AVOCATORE [*To MOSCA*] Sir, are you married?

VOLPONE

They'll be allied, anon; I must be resolute:

*He puts off his disguise*

The Fox shall, here, uncase.

MOSCA

Patron!

VOLPONE

Nay, now,

85

My ruins shall not come alone; your match

I'll hinder sure: my substance shall not glue you,

Nor screw you, into a family.

MOSCA

Why, patron!

VOLPONE

I am Volpone, and this is my knave;

This, his own knave; this, avarice's fool;

This, a chimera of wittol, fool, and knave;

And, reverend fathers, since we all can hope

Nought, but a sentence, let's not now despair it.

You hear me brief.

90

84 *allied* i.e. by a marriage bargain

84 *anon* in a moment

85 *uncase* remove disguise, perhaps with a suggestion of the fox breaking cover

85 *Patron!* Mosca is apparently startled back into his servile role

87 *glue* suggests a parasitic attachment

88 *screw* suggests a tortuous one

89 *knave* menial; rogue

90 *fool* dupe

91 *chimera* mythical beast with a lion-head, goat-body and serpent-tail; hence a triple monster

91 *wittol* conniving cuckold

93 *let's . . . it* 'let us not despair for want of a sentence'

CORVINO

May it please your fatherhoods—

COMMENDATORE

Silence!

1st AVOCATORE

The knot is now undone, by miracle!

95

2nd AVOCATORE

Nothing can be more clear.

3rd AVOCATORE

Or can more prove

These innocent.

1st AVOCATORE

Give 'em their liberty.

BONARIO

Heaven could not, long, let such gross crimes be hid.

2nd AVOCATORE

If this be held the highway to get riches,

May I be poor.

3rd AVOCATORE

This's not the gain, but torment.

100

1st AVOCATORE

These possess wealth, as sick men possess fevers,

Which, trulier, may be said to possess them.

2nd AVOCATORE

Disrobe that parasite.

CORVINO, MOSCA

Most honoured fathers—

1st AVOCATORE

Can you plead ought to stay the course of justice?

If you can, speak.

CORVINO, VOLTORE

We beg favour.

CELIA

And mercy.

105

1st AVOCATORE

You hurt your innocence, suing for the guilty.

Stand forth; and first, the parasite. You appear

T'have been the chiefest minister, if not plotter,

In all these lewd impostures; and now, lastly,

Have, with your impudence, abused the court,

And habit of a gentleman of Venice,

Being a fellow of no birth, or blood:

For which, our sentence is, first thou be whipped;

Then live perpetual prisoner in our gallies.

110

VOLPONE

I thank you, for him.

MOSCA

Bane to thy wolfish nature.

115

100 *This's* i.e. riches108 *minister* agent, instrument109 *lewd* wicked, base

115 s.p. VOLPONE ed. (FQ VOLT.) Gifford recognised the connection with line 81 where Mosca thanks the court for Volpone's sentence

115 *Bane* death

1st AVOCATORE

Deliver him to the Saffi. [*MOSCA is led off*] Thou, Volpone,  
 By blood, and rank a gentleman, canst not fall  
 Under like censure; but our judgement on thee  
 Is, that thy substance all be straight confiscate  
 To the hospital, of the *Incurabili*: 120  
 And, since the most was gotten by imposture,  
 By feigning lame, gout, palsy, and such diseases,  
 Thou art to lie in prison, cramped with irons,  
 Till thou be'st sick, and lame indeed. Remove him.

VOLPONE

This is called mortifying of a fox. [*VOLPONE is led off*] 125

1st AVOCATORE

Thou, Voltore, to take away the scandal  
 Thou hast given all worthy men, of thy profession,  
 Art banished from their fellowship, and our state.  
 Corbaccio!—bring him near. We here possess  
 Thy son, of all thy state; and confine thee 130  
 To the monastery of *San Spirito*:  
 Where, since thou knew'st not how to live well here,  
 Thou shalt be learn'd to die well.

CORBACCIO

Ha! what said he?

COMMENDATORE

You shall know anon, sir.

1st AVOCATORE

Thou, Corvino, shalt

Be straight embarked from thine own house, and rowed 135  
 Round about Venice, through the Grand Canal,  
 Wearing a cap, with fair, long ass's ears,  
 Instead of horns: and, so to mount, a paper  
 Pinned on thy breast, to the *berlino*—

CORVINO

Yes,

And, have mine eyes beat out with stinking fish, 140

116 *Saffi* bailiffs (see III.viii, 16n.)

120 *Incurabili* the Hospital of Incurables was founded in Venice in 1522 for the treatment of venereal disease; the punishment is therefore particularly appropriate

125 *mortifying* several senses are relevant: humiliating; rendering dead to the world and the flesh by spiritual discipline; hanging game to make it tender

131 *San Spirito* the monastery of the Holy Spirit stood on the Giudecca canal

136 *Canal* the *FQ canale* probably indicates Italian pronunciation, as the English word was not then used in this sense

139 *berlino* pillory

Bruised fruit, and rotten eggs—'Tis well. I'm glad,  
I shall not see my shame, yet.

1st AVOCATORE

And to expiate

Thy wrongs done to thy wife, thou art to send her  
Home, to her father, with her dowry trebled:

And these are all your judgements—

ALL

Honoured fathers.

145

1st AVOCATORE

Which may not be revoked. Now, you begin,  
When crimes are done, and past, and to be punished,  
To think what your crimes are: away with them!

Let all, that see these vices thus rewarded,

Take heart, and love to study 'em. Mischiefs feed

Like beasts, till they be fat, and then they bleed. [*Exeunt*]

150

VOLPONE

[*To speak the Epilogue*]

VOLPONE

The seasoning of a play is the applause.

Now, though the Fox be punished by the laws,

He, yet, doth hope there is no suffering due,

For any fact, which he hath done 'gainst you;

If there be, censure him: here he, doubtful, stands.

If not, fare jovially, and clap your hands.

155

THE END

155 *fact* crime (as in the legal phrase 'after the fact')



## APPENDIX I

### ANALOGUES AND DOCUMENTS

AS INDICATED in the Introduction and notes, the play has no one specific source but is nevertheless intricately connected with the literature and drama of the past. The following extracts are intended in part to suggest those connections and in part to supply background material relating to early seventeenth-century Venice.

#### LEGACY HUNTING

*Horace, Satires, II.v, 45-57* [Loeb Classical Library, 1929]

Si cui praeterea validus male filius in re  
praeclara sublatus aletur, ne manifestum  
caelibis obsequium nudet te, leniter in spem  
adrepe officiosus, ut et scribare secundus  
heres et, si quis casus puerum egerit Orco,  
in vacuum venias: perraro haec alea fallit.

Qui testamentum tradet tibi cumque legendum,  
abnuere et tabulas a te remove memento,  
sic tamen, ut limis rapias, quid prima secundo  
cera velit versu; solus multisne coheres,  
veloci percurrere oculo. plerumque recoctus  
scriba ex quinqueviro corvum deludet hiantem,  
captatorque dabit risus Nasica Corano.

Again, if one with a fine fortune rears a sickly son whom he has taken up, then for fear lest open devotion to a childless man betray you, by your attentions worm your way to the hope that you may be named as second heir, and if some chance send the child to his grave, you may pass into his place. Seldom does this game fail.

Suppose someone gives you his will to read, be sure to decline and push the tablets from you; yet in such a way that with a side glance you may catch the substance of the second line on the first page. Swiftly run your eye across to see whether you are sole heir or share with others. Quite often a constable, new-boiled into a clerk, will dupe the gaping raven, and Nasica the fortune-hunter will make sport for Coranus.

*Lucian, Dialogues of the Dead V* [translated H. Williams, 1913]

*Pluto and Hermes*

*Pluto.* You know that old man, I mean the very aged and infirm fellow, the rich Eukrates, who has no children, but fifty thousand legacy-hunters?

*Hermes.* Yes, you speak of the Sikyonian. What then?

*Pluto.* Well, let him live on, Hermes; to the ninety years he has already reached dealing out so many again, and, if, at least, it were possible, even yet more. But as for those fawning flatterers of his, the young Charinus, and Damon, and the rest, drag them all down here, one after the other, the whole lot of them.

*Hermes.* Such a proceeding would appear strange.

*Pluto.* Not at all, but exceedingly just. For what wrong have they suffered that they pray for his death, or, although no way related, why do they lay claim to his money? But what of all things is most abominable is, that though they entertain such wishes, they yet court and fawn upon him in public; and, when he is ill, their designs are very evident to all; but, all the same, they engage to offer a sacrifice if he should get better; and, altogether, the fawning of these gentlemen is of a somewhat subtle and complicated character. So let the one remain untouched by death, and let the others go off before him, while vainly gaping in *affected admiration*.

*Hermes.* They will suffer a ridiculous fate, rascals that they are. But he, indeed, charmingly cheats and buoys them up with vain hopes exceedingly; and, in a word, while always appearing like a corpse, he has far more strength than the young men. They, however, already have divided out the legacy among themselves, and are living upon it, promising to themselves a happy time of it.

*Pluto.* Therefore, let him put off his old age and renew his youth like Iolaus; but as for them, in the midst of their hopes, leaving behind them the wealth they have been dreaming of, let them come *here* this moment, miserable wretches dying miserably.

*Hermes.* Have no anxiety, Pluto; for I will go after them for you at once, one by one in their order. There are seven of them, I believe.

*Pluto.* Drag them down. The old fellow shall follow each of them to the tomb, while he himself, from being aged, shall again be in the prime of youth.

## THE AFFLICTIONS OF AGE

*Juvenal, Satire X 188-208, 217-239* [Loeb Classical Library, 1940]

‘Da spatium vitae, multos da, Iuppiter, annos’:  
hoc recto vultu, solum hoc, et pallidus optas.  
sed quam continuus et quantis longa senectus  
plena malis! deformem et taetrum ante omnia vultum  
dissimilemque sui, deformem pro cute pellem  
pendentisque genas et talis aspice rugas  
quales, umbriferos ubi pandit Thabraca saltus,  
in vetula scalpit iam mater simia bucca.  
plurima sunt iuvenum discrimina; pulchrior ille  
hoc atque ille alio, multum hic robustior illo:  
una senum facies. cum voce trementia membra  
et iam leve caput madidique infantia nasi,  
frangendus misero gingiva panis inermi;  
usque adeo gravis uxori natisque sibique,  
ut captatori moveat fastidia Cosso.  
non eadem vini atque cibi torpente palato  
gaudia. nam coitus iam longa oblivio, vel si  
coneris, iacet exiguus cum ramice nervus  
et quamvis tota palpetur nocte, iacebit.  
anne aliquid sperare potest haec inguinis aegri  
canities? quid quod merito suspecta libido est  
quae venerem adfectat sine viribus?

Praeterea minimus gelido iam in corpore sanguis  
febre calet sola, circumsilit agmine facto  
morborum omne genus, quorum si nomina quaeras,  
promptius expediam quot amaverit Oppia moechos,  
quot Themison aegros autumno occiderit uno,  
quot Basilus socios, quot circumscripserit Hirrus  
pupillos; quot longa viros exorbeat uno  
Maura die, quot discipulos inclinet Hamillus;  
percurram citius quot villas possideat nunc  
quo tondente gravis iuveni mihi barba sonabat.  
ille umero, hic lumbis, hic coxa debilis; ambos  
perdidit ille oculos et luscis invidet; huius  
pallida labra cibum accipiunt digitis alienis,  
ipse ad conspectum cenae diducere rictum  
suetus hiat tantum ceu pullus hirundinis, ad quem  
ore volat pleno mater ieiuna. sed omni  
membrorum damno maior dementia, quae nec  
nomina servorum nec vultum agnoscit amici  
cum quo praeterita cenavit nocte, nec illos



quos genuit, quos eduxit. nam codice saevo  
heredes vetat esse suos, bona tota feruntur  
ad Phialen; tantum artificis valet halitus oris  
quod steterat multis in carcere fornicis annis.

'Give me length of days, give me many years, O Jupiter!' Such is your one and only prayer, in days of strength or of sickness; yet how great, how unceasing, are the miseries of long old age! Look first at the misshapen and ungainly face, so unlike its former self; see the unsightly hide that serves for skin; see the pendulous cheeks and the wrinkles like those which a matron baboon carves upon her aged jaws where Thabraca spreads her shaded glades. The young men differ in various ways: this man is handsomer than that, and he than another; one is far stronger than another: but old men all look alike. Their voices are as shaky as their limbs, their heads without hair, their noses drivelling as in childhood. Their bread, poor wretches, has to be munched by toothless gums; so offensive do they become to their wives, their children and themselves, that even the legacy-hunter, Cossus, turns from them in disgust. Their sluggish palate takes joy in wine or food no longer, and all pleasures of the flesh have been long ago forgotten. . . .

Besides all this, the little blood in his now chilly frame is never warm except with fever; diseases of every kind dance around him in a troop; if you ask of me their names, I could more readily tell you the number of Oppia's paramours, how many patients Themison killed in one autumn, how many partners were defrauded by Basilus, or wards by Hirrus, or pupils are corrupted by Hamillus, how many lovers tall Maura wears out in one day; I could sooner run over the number of villas now belonging to the barber under whose razor my stiff youthful beard used to grate. One suffers in the shoulder, another in the loins, a third in the hip; another has lost both eyes, and envies those who have one; another takes food into his pallid lips from someone else's fingers, while he whose jaws used to fly open at the sight of his dinner, now only gapes like the young of a swallow whose fasting mother flies to him with well-laden beak. But worse than any loss in body is the failing mind which forgets the names of slaves, and cannot recognise the face of the old friend who dined with him last night, nor those of the children whom he has begotten and brought up. Yes, by a cruel will he cuts off his own flesh and blood and leaves all his estate to Phiale—so potent was the breath of that alluring mouth which had plied its trade for so many years in her narrow archway.

THE VENETIAN SCENE [from Thomas Coryat, *Crudities* (1611, 1905)]

### The Treasure of Saint Mark

Here they say is kept marveilous abundance of rich stones of exceeding worth, as Diamonds, Carbuncles, Emeralds, Chrysolites, Jacinths, and great pearles of admirable value: also three Unicorns hornes; an exceeding great Carbuncle which was bestowed upon the Senate by the Cardinall Grimannus, and a certaine Pitcher adorned with great variety of pretious stones, which Usumcassanes King of Persia bestowed upon the Signiory, with many other things of wonderful value.

### Mountebanks

I hope it will not be esteemed for an impertinencie to my discourse, if I next speake of the Mountebanks of Venice, seeing amongst many other thinges that doe much famouse this Citie, these two sorts of people, namely the Cortezans and the Mountebanks are not the least: for although there are Mountebanks also in other Cities of Italy; yet because there is a greater concourse of them in Venice then else where, and that of the better sort and the most eloquent fellowes; and also for that there is a larger tolleration of them here then in other Cities (for in Rome, &c. they are restrained from certain matters as I have heard which are heere allowed them) therefore they use to name a Venetian Mountebanke *κατ' ἐξοχήν* for the coryphaeus and principall Mountebanke of all Italy: neither doe I much doubt but that this treatise of them will be acceptable to some readers, as being a meere novelty never before heard of (I thinke) by thousands of our English Gallants. Surely the principall reason that hath induced me to make mention of them is, because when I was in Venice, they oftentimes ministred infinite pleasure unto me.

The principall place where they act, is the first part of Saint Marks street that reacheth betwixt the West front of S. Marks Church, and the opposite front of Saint Geminians Church. In which, twice a day, that is, in the morning and in the afternoone, you may see five or sixe severall stages erected for them: those that act upon the ground, even the foresaid Ciarlatans being of the poorer sort of them, stand most commonly in the second part of S. Marks, not far from the gate of the Dukes Palace. These Mountebanks at one end of their stage place their trunke, which is replenished with a world of new-fangled trumperies. After the whole rabble of them is gotten up to the stage, whereof some weare visards being disguised like fooles in a play, some that are

women (for there are divers women also amongst them) are attyred with habits according to that person that they sustaine; after (I say) they are all upon the stage, the musicke begins. Sometimes vocall, sometimes instrumentall, and sometimes both together. This musicke is a preamble and introduction to the ensuing matter: in the meane time while the musicke playes, the principall Mountebanke which is the Captaine and ring-leader of all the rest, opens his truncke, and sets abroach his wares; after the musicke hath ceased, he maketh an oration to the audience of halfe an houre long, or almost an houre. Wherein he doth most hyperbolically extoll the vertue of his drugs and confections:

*Laudat venales qui vult extrudere merces.*

Though many of them are very counterfeit and false. Truly I often wondered at many of these naturall Orators. For they would tell their tales with such admirable volubility and plausible grace, even extempore, and seasoned with that singular variety of elegant jests and witty conceits, that they did often strike great admiration into strangers that never heard them before: and by how much the more eloquent these Naturalists are, by so much the greater audience they draw unto them, and the more ware they sell. After the chieftest Mountebankes first speech is ended, he delivereth out his commodities by little and little, the jester still playing his part, and the musitians singing and playing upon their instruments. The principall things that they sell are oyles, soveraigne waters, amorous songs printed, Apothecary drugs, and a Commonweale of other trifles. The head Mountebanke at every time that he delivereth out any thing, maketh an extemporall speech, which he doth eftsoones intermingle with such savory jests (but spiced now and then with singular scurrility) that they minister passing mirth and laughter to the whole company, which perhaps may consist of a thousand people that flocke together about one of their stages.

### **Wives and Courtesans**

As for the number of these Venetian Cortezans it is very great. . . .

A most ungodly thing without doubt that there should be a tolleration of such licentious wantons in so glorious, so potent, so renowned a city. . . .

For they thinke that the chastity of their wives would be the sooner assaulted, and so consequently they should be capricornified, (which of all the indignities in the world the Venetian cannot

patiently endure) were it not for these places of evacuation. But I marvaile how that should be true though these Cortezans were utterly rooted out of the City. For the Gentlemen do even coope up their wives alwaies within the walles of their houses for feare of these inconveniences, as much as if there were no Cortezans at all in the City. So that you shall very seldome see a Venetian Gentleman's wife but either at the solemnization of a great marriage, or at the Christning of a Jew, or late in the evening rowing in a Gondola. . . .

For so infinite are the allurements of these amorous Calypsoes, that the fame of them hath drawn many to Venice from some of the remotest parts of Christendome, to contemplate their beauties, and enjoy their pleasing dalliances. And indeede such is the variety of the delicious objects they minister to their lovers, that they want nothing tending to delight. For when you come into one of their Palaces (as indeed some few of the principallest of them live in very magnificent and portly buildings fit for the entertainment of a great Prince) you seeme to enter into the Paradise of Venus. For their fairest roomes are most glorious and glittering to behold. . . .

As for her selfe shee comes to thee decked like the Queene and Goddesses of love, in so much that thou wilt thinke she made a late transmigration from Paphos, Cnidos, or Cythera, the auncient habitations of Dame Venus. For her face is adorned with the quintessence of beauty. In her cheekes thou shalt see the Lilly and the Rose strive for the supremacy, and the silver tramels of her haire displayed in that curious manner besides her two frised peakes standing up like pretty Pyramides, that they give thee the true Cos amoris.

### **The Game of Balloo**

Here every Sunday and Holy-day in the evening the young men of the citie doe exercise themselves at a certaine play that they call Baloone, which is thus: Sixe or seven yong men or thereabout weare certaine round things upon their armes, made of timber, which are full of sharpe pointed knobs cut out of the same matter. In these exercises they put off their doublets, and having put this round instrument upon one of their armes, they tosse up and downe a great ball, as great as our football in England: sometimes they will tosse the ball with this instrument, as high as a common Church, and about one hundred paces at the least from them.

## The Strappado

On the fourth day of August being Thursday, I saw a very Tragically and dolefull spectacle in Saint Markes place. Two men tormented with the strapado, which is done in this manner. The offender having his hands bound behind him, is conveighed into a rope that hangeth in a pully, and after hoysed up in the rope to a great heighth with two severall swinges, where he sustaineth so great torments that his joynts are for the time loosed and pulled asunder; besides such abundance of blood is gathered into his hands and face, that for the time he is in the torture, his face and hands doe looke as red as fire.

## Tortoises and Gentlemen in the Market

Amongst many other strange fishes that I have observed in their market places, I have scene many Torteises, whereof I never saw but one in all England. Besides they have great plenty of fowle, and such admirable variety thereof, that I have heard in the citie they are furnished with no lesse then two hundred severall sortes of them. I have observed a thing amongst the Venetians, that I have not a little wondred at, that their Gentlemen and greatest Senators, a man worth perhaps two millions of duckats, will come into the market, and buy their flesh, fish, fruites, and such other things as are necessary for the maintenance of their family: a token indeed of frugality, which is commendable in all men; but me thinkes it is not an argument of true generosity, that a noble spirit should deject it selfe to these petty and base matters, that are fitter to be done by servants then men of a generose parentage. Therefore I commend mine owne countrey-man, the English Gentleman, that scorneth to goe into the market to buy his victuals and other necessities for house-keeping, but employeth his Cooke or Cator about those inferior and sordid affaires.

## The Robes of Gentlemen

It is said there are of all the Gentlemen of Venice, which are there called Clarissimoes, no lesse then three thousand, all which when they goe abroad out of their houses, both they that beare office, and they that are private, doe weare gownes: wherein they imitate Romanos rerum Dominos, gentemque togatam. Most of their gownes are made of blacke cloth, and over their left shoulder they have a flappe made of the same cloth, and edged with blacke Taffata: Also most of their gownes are faced before with blacke

Taffata: There are others also that weare other gownes according to their distinct offices and degrees; as they that are of the Councell of tenne (which are as it were the maine body of the whole estate) doe most commonly weare blacke chamlet gownes, with marvellous long sleeves, that reach almost downe to the ground. Againe they that weare red chamlet gownes with long sleeves, are those that are called Savi, whereof some have authority onely by land, as being the principall Overseers of the Podesta'es and Prætors in their land cities, and some by Sea. There are others also that weare blew cloth gownes with blew flapps over their shoulders, edged with Taffata. These are the Secretaries of the Councell of tenne. Upon every great festivall day the Senators, and greatest Gentlemen that accompany the Duke to Church, or to any other place, doe weare crimson damaske gownes, with flappes of crimson velvet cast over their left shoulders. Likewise the Venetian Knights weare blacke damaske gownes with long sleeves: but hereby they are distinguished from the other Gentlemen. For they weare red apparell under their gownes, red silke stockings, and red pantafles. All these gowned men doe weare marvellous little blacke flat caps of felt, without any brimmes at all, and very diminutive falling bandes, no ruffes at all, which are so shallow, that I have seene many of them not above a little inch deepe. The colour that they most affect and use for their other apparel, I mean doublet, hose, and jerkin, is blacke: a colour of gravity and decency.

#### POSSESSION AND IMPOSTURE

The extracts that follow are from Herford and Simpson, *Ben Jonson's Works*, Vol. IX (1950), pp. 731-2. They relate to Act V, Scene xii, lines 22-35.

25. *vomits crooked pinnes.* In *A Tryal of Witches at the Assizes Held at Bury St. Edmonds . . . on the Tenth day of March, 1664. Before Sir Matthew Hale K'*, 1682, p. 21, Samuel Pacy, a merchant of Lowestoft, deposed about his two children, supposed to be bewitched: 'At other times They would fall into Swounings, & upon the recovery to their speech they would Cough extreamly, & bring up much Flegme, and with the same crooked Pins, and one time a Two-penny Nail with a very broad head, which Pins (amounting to Forty or more) together with the Two-penny Nail were produced in Court, with the affirmation of the said Deponent, that he was present when the Said Nail was Vomited up, and also most of the Pins.'

27. *His mouth's running away.* Cf. Darrell, *A true Narration of the strange and grevous Vexation by the Devil, of . . . William Somers of Nottingham*, 1600, p. 19: 'He was also continually torne in very fearful manner and disfigured in his face: wherein sometimes his lips were drawne awry, now to the one syde now to the other: sometimes his face and neck distorted, to the right and to the left hand, yea sometimes writhen to his back.'

28, 29. *in his belly . . . in his throate.* Samuel Harsnet, *A Discovery of the fraudulent practises of Iohn Darrel*, 1599, p. 213, quotes Somers's confession of his imposture: 'I did moue first the calfe of my legge, then my knee-bone, which motion of the knee will likewise make a motion or rising of the thigh. Also by drawing and stopping of my wind, my bellie would stirre and shewe a kind of swelling. The bunch (as p. 214 they tearmed it) about my chest, was by the thrusting out of my breast. Likewise my secret swallowing did make the ende of my windepipe to moue, and to shew greater then vsually it is: Againe, by mouing of my iawes, one bunch was easily made in the side, my cheeke neere mine eare: and about the middle of my cheeke with the ende of my tongue thrust against it. These motions by practise I woulde make very fast, one after another: so that there might easily seeme to bee running in my bodie of some thing, from place to place.'

31. *blew toad.* Ibid., p. 53, 'The booke of the boye of Burton' (Thomas Darling, another of Darrell's tools) 'sayeth, that towards the end of the fast for his pretended dispossession, *he began to heaue & lift vehementlie at his stomacke, and getting up some fleagme and choler said (pointing with his finger, and following with his eyes) looke, looke, see you not the mouse that is gone out of my mouth? and so pointed after it, vnto the farthest part of the parlor.*'

## APPENDIX II

### A SELECTION OF VARIANTS

#### A. VERBAL VARIANTS (affecting the choice of a word in a modernised text)

The Folio reading has been adopted except where otherwise stated.

#### The Epistle (see also note on p. 9, line 143)

- 58 F Yet, to (Q or to)  
59 F ingenuously (Q ingeniously)  
77 F severe (Q grave)  
82 F among (Q in)  
88 F filth (Q garbage)

#### The Prologue

- 1 F yet (Q God)

#### Act I

- 1.1.34 F shares, I fat [one copy] (Q F [*corrected*] shares; fat)  
[Q adopted]  
1.2.70 F Selves (Q Themselves)  
1.2.75 F Eene his (Q His very)  
1.2.82 F adds in margin *One knocks/without.*  
1.2.88 F Without (Q Within)  
1.2.100 F without (Q within)  
1.3.66 F adds in margin *Another knocks.*  
1.4.28 F I doe conceive you (Q I conceive you)  
1.4.60 F What then did (Q But what did)  
1.4.159 F adds in margin *Another knocks.*  
1.5.37 F adds in margin *They embrace.*  
1.5.84 F adds in margin *Another knocks.*

#### Act II

- 2.1.50 F *Arch-dukes!* (Q Arch-duke,)  
2.1.64 F knew (Q know)  
2.2.67 F 't makes (Q makes)  
2.2.81-2 F or of thee (Q or the)  
2.2.109 F adds in margin *Pointing to his/bill and his/glasse.*  
2.2.153 F besides (Q beside)



- 2.2.222 F adds in margin CELIA *at the/windo' throwes/downe her/handkerchiefe.*  
 2.3.1 F Spight o' (Q Bloud of)  
 2.3.2 F adds in margin *He beates away/the montebanke/&c.*  
 2.3.16 F lose (Q loose)  
 2.4.6 F [*corrected*] an (Q F [*uncorrected*] some)  
 2.5.66 F adds in margin *Knocke within.*  
 2.6.75 F who (Q that)

## Act III

- 3.2.60 F It is (Q Is is)  
 3.3.20 F adds in margin *One knocks.*  
 3.4.90 F MONTAGNIE (Q Montagnié) [Q adopted]  
 3.6.2 F adds in margin *One knockes.*  
 3.7.10 F adds in margin *To Bonario.*  
 3.7.119 F thy thy (Q thy) [Q adopted]  
 3.7.139 F adds in margin *He leapes off/from his couch.*  
 3.7.172 F lose (Q loose)  
 3.7.266 F adds in margin *He leapes out/from where/Mosca had/plac'd him.*  
 3.8.15 F adds in margin *They knock/without.*

## Act IV

- 4.1.15 F with (Q with with)  
 4.1.57 F too (Q two)  
 4.4.15 F adds in margin *To Voltore.*  
 4.4.16 F doth (Q do's)  
 4.4.17 F adds in margin *To Corbaccio.*  
 4.4.20 F adds in margin *To Corvino, then/to Voltore a-/gaine.*  
 4.5.4 F So, the yong man (Q So has the youth)  
 4.5.43 F goodnesse (Q vertue)  
 4.5.72 F lords (Q Sires)  
 4.5.127 F shame (Q harme)  
 4.5.130 F catholique (Q Christian)  
 4.5.132 F adds in margin *She swownes.*  
 4.6.20 F adds in margin *Volpone is/brought in, as/impotent.*

## Act V

- 5.1.12 F adds in margin *He drinks.*  
 5.1.16 F adds in margin *Drinks againe.*  
 5.2.102 F adds in margin *Cestus.* [Q adopted]

- 5.3.8 F adds in margin *Volpone peepes/|from behinde a/|*  
*traverse.*
- 5.3.114 F *Commandatori* (Q *Commandadori*)
- 5.4.47 F adds in margin *They knocke/|without.*
- 5.4.55 F Fitted (Q Apted)
- 5.4.61 F adds in margin *They rush in.*
- 5.4.72 F adds in margin *They pul of the/shel and disco-/|ver him.*
- 5.5.Head F adds in margin *The first, in the habit of a Com-/|*  
*mandadore:/|the other, of a/|Clarissimo.*
- 5.8.24 F adds in margin *Mosca walks/by 'hem.*
- 5.10.30 F some-deale (Q somewhere)
- 5.10.50 F it cannot be, but he is possest, grave fathers.  
 (Q It cannot be (my Sires) but he is possest).
- 5.12.15 F adds in margin *Volpone whis-/|pers the Advo-/|cate.*
- 5.12.23 F adds in margin *Volture falls.*
- 5.12.54 F o' the hinge (Q on the henge)
- 5.12.84 F adds in margin *He puts off his/disguise.*
- 5.12.130 F thy state (Q thy'estate)

## B. PUNCTUATION VARIANTS

Although a slight prejudice in favour of the Quarto punctuation is suggested by the textual hypothesis outlined on page xxxii, there are a number of instances in which the Folio departures from the Quarto are apparently deliberate. They have been taken by Herford and Simpson as evidence of authorial revision, and by de Vocht as proof of the Folio editor's limited competence. Many are likely, however, to be the work of compositors intervening to conform the text to printing-house convention. None are of great importance, but some affect the pace, inflexion or significance of certain passages.

In a number of instances the Folio replaces Quarto dashes with full stops. In the present text the Quarto dashes have been retained at 3.7.111 (ask—), 3.7.122 (satisfy—), 5.10.26 (fathers—), 5.12.103 (fathers—), 5.12.145 (judgements—). In all these cases the sense appears to gain by being represented as incomplete. Where the thought appears complete, however, the Quarto dashes have been dropped (as in the Folio): e.g. at 5.10.19 (Q all—), and at 5.12.59 (Q gentleman—).

The Quarto often uses colons, semi-colons or even commas at the end of speeches, and the Folio substitutes a full stop. This edition follows the Folio where it appears to observe the modern practice of using a stop when a thought is complete—the stops ought not to be allowed to lessen the pace of the dialogue; it treats the Quarto punctuation as a suspension mark where the thought appears

incomplete. Thus the Folio has been followed at (e.g.) 1.2.111 (Q Mosca;), 1.5.67 (Q means;), and 2.2.38 (Q Piazza;). But the Quarto has been interpreted by a dash at 3.7.72 (Q you,), 3.7.124 (Q ruin:), 4.6.16 (Q consciences:), 4.6.73 (Q fault:), 4.6.80 (Q it,), 5.2.98 (Q oils,).

Two longer speeches affected by conspicuous differences of scoring between Quarto and Folio are 3.7.240–60 and 2.2.133–70. In both cases I have preferred the Folio. In Celia's long speech (3.7.240–60) the Quarto offers eight dashes in six lines (pierc'd—, open'd—, touch'd—, you—, *Saints*—, *Heaven*—, scape—), and has been held to make the speech more vehement and impulsive; the Folio reaches a climax, however, with much better control.

